ETERNAL FLAME

(Aspects of GHALIB'S Life and Works)

By the same Author

IQBAL AND HIS POEMS
(A Reappraisal)

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By

K N SUD



STERLING PUBLISHERS (P) Ltd.

DELHI 6 JULLUNDUR CITY

ETERNAL FLAME

(Aspects of GHALIB S Life and Works)

STERLING PUBLISHERS (P) LTD
Jullundur City 695, Model Town
Delhi 6 3640 Mori Gate

First Edition 1969

Price Rs 15 00

PRINTED IN INDIA

PUBLISHED BY SH S K GHAI MANAGING DIRECTOR STERLING PUBLISHERS (P) LTD, AND PRINTED AT KAPUR PRINTING PRESS, DELHI 6

PREFACE

Quite a good deal has been written on Mirza Ghalib in Urdu but not enough in English or any other language Besides dozens of critical appraisals by Urdu scholars, the poet s own collection of verses *Diwan i Ghalib* which in fact made him immortal, has passed through scores of editions

Many of those who have dealt with Ghalib s life and works have brought much scholarship and painstaking study to bear on their effort and the present book has profited by that in no small measure But the thirst for more and more about Ghalib is never really quenched especially among the non Urdu knowing public in India and abroad His death centenary has only whetted it And no amount of brick and mortar can be as rewarding as a contemplation of the poet s moods and mind inspired by the study of his life and works

Eternal Flame has been written for the benefit of readers not versed in Urdu yet whose admiration and love of this language and its luminaries remains none the less for their ignorance of its idiom and script An added attraction for such is the reproduction in Roman, with a literal translation into English of some of the most popular Ghalib couplets

The book does not purport to be a biography of the Mirza or a chronicle in the accepted sense of the term its aim being to acquaint the reader with the different aspects of the poet s life and activities—his domestic tragedy, his fight for pension his relations with the (Moghal) King and the British officers the im mediate effect of the sepoy Mutiny on his life his wit and humour, his love of wine his letters to friends and pupils—all of course that went to contribute to the uniqueness of his style of ghazal writing and his place among the poets of Urdu and Persian

One more feature of the present attempt is a chapter on the Mirza s biographer, Maulana Hali, who wrote from first hand

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personal knowledge of the poet particularly written to see how Ghalib looked to his contemporaries—and to us in a reflected light

C 17 Hauz Khas
New Delhi 16

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HE MAN AND HIS MANNER



Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib

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THE MAN AND HIS MANNER

MIRZA ASADULLAH KHAN GHALIB traces his genealogy back to Iran's legendary dynasty known as Peshdadians or the "Early Law Givers" They belonged to one of the four sects of that country s first royal family called Gulshai The other three sects were the Keianians the Ashkanians and the Sassanians The Peshdadian group s founder was Keiomarz the Zoroastrian Adam who is said to have laid the foundation of civilisation in Iran This period is considered by the Iranians as their heroic age and has been immortaliz ed by Firdausi in his great epic *Shahnama* (History of Kings) The best known ruler in the line of Keiomars was Jamshid who is credited with the introduction of the solar year and the invention of wine which has inspired most poets of the Orient down the ages It is said that he had preserved some grapes which fermented and were believed to be dangerous to life One of his queens who was suffering from an ailment drank the fermented beverage with a view to ending her life but, on the contrary, she fell into a delight ful sleep and was cured ! The Iranians since that day have termed wine as sweet poison

Jamshid, after ruling the country for several years became vain glorious and declared himself a god He was put

to a barbarous death by Zohak, a Syrian prince, who in turn was overthrown by Jamshid s grandson Feridun On Feridun s death there was a struggle for succession among his three sons—Tur Selm and Erij Erij was assassinated but his son Manuchehr drove Tur and Selm out of Iran They entered Turkey with their followers and there founded a new dynasty by the name of Turan It brought about a fusion of the Turkish and Iranian races and that is why Ghalib declared that he was a Turk of the Aibak community

The Turanians had a rough time and were involved in internecine wars Finally the house of Seljuks headed by Toghril Beg (1037 1063) emerged victorious and ruled over an area stretching from Turkestan to the Mediterranean Sea for nearly three hundred years It was during this period that the famous master of rubai, Omar Khayyam (Tent Maker) brought immortal fame to Iran just as centuries later the great ghazal writer Ghalib brought immortal fame to *his* country India

The house of Seljuks too ultimately broke up and some of its scions took to looting and killing while others armed with swords, fanned out in search of adventure Among the latter was Tursam Khan who settled in Samarkand He was the great grandfather of Ghalib Tursam Khan s son, Kokan Khan quarrelled with him and in protest left home for India around the year 1750 in the company of Qasim Jan, Alam Jan and Arif Jan who were the earliest forbears of the princely family of Loharu State He was employed by Nawab Moinul Mulk of Lahore On the Nawab s death Kokan Khan moved down to Delhi and through the good offices of Nawab Zulfiqar ul Daula joined the forces of Moghal Prince Ali Guhar (later known as King Shah Alam) The Prince at that time was busy quelling revolts in the eastern parts of the empire He gave Kokan Khan the charge of a cavalry unit But the fortunes of the Moghal dynasty were on the decline with large areas slipping

out of its control one by one Kokan Khan shifted his loyalty to the Maharaja of Jaipur He also left Delhi and settled permanently at Agra

Kokan Khan had four sons and three daughters Ghalib s father, Mirza Abdullah Beg Khan, took service in the court of Nawab Asif ul Daula of Lucknow but soon went over to the Nizam of Hyderabad After several years' service he lost his job as a result of family quarrels There after he joined the forces of Raja Bakhtawar Singh of Alwar The Raja sent him to put down a revolt by one of his chief tains and Abdullah Beg was killed in action in the year 1802 His two sons were assigned revenue from two villages and a modest pension for their upbringing Their uncle Nasrullah Beg took up the responsibility of looking after them

After the British had by and large established their authority in India, Ghalib s uncle was taken as a Risaldar in the army He was allotted two revenue circles for meeting the expenses of the unit under him When he died his British employers arranged pensions for his descendants from the revenues of Firozepur Jhirka

The martial tradition of the family ended with the death of Ghalib s father and uncle Neither the poet nor his brother, Yousaf Khan showed any inclination for military service The latter died as a lunatic in 1857 Ghalib, how ever, was very proud of the warlike actions of his forbears He says

Sau pusht se hai paisha i aaba sipagari

(Soldiering has been the vocation of my family for a hundred generations)

Nothing is known about Ghalib s other uncles and their descendants Probably there were none His mother, Begum Izzat ul Nisa, was the daughter of Mirza Ghulam Husain Khan Kamidan a commandant in the army and a leading citizen of Agra who was very wealthy and owned a number of buildings in the city The biggest of these, known as

Kala Mahal, was once the residence of Raja Gaj Singh, son of Raja Suraj Singh of Jodhpur, who accompanied King Akbar during his campaign in Gujarat It was in Kala Mahal that Ghalib was born on the twenty seventh of December 1797 Begum Izzat ul Nisa lived in her father s house until the end Mirza Abdullah Beg also stayed with his in laws most of the time and was nicknamed Mirza Dulha (bridegroom)

Ghalib writes feelingly of his early days in Agra where the Muse first inspired him At night he used to sit in the room right over the portico of Kala Mahal playing chess gossiping and discussing love affairs In the morning he would fly kites with young Balwant Singh son of Raja Chet Singh of Banaras Balwant Singh was also a distinguished Urdu and Persian poet There are a number of other houses in Agra to which Ghalib has referred in his letters and which still exist Two mohallas are named after him—Bara Ghalibpura and Chhota Ghalibpura Both are thickly populated

Nothing exact is known about Ghalib s early schooling It is, however taken for granted that since he spent his childhood at his maternal grandparents house he must have received adequate instruction from competent teachers because Mirza Kamidan was one of the richest men of the town According to Ghalib s biographer, Maulana Altaf Husain Hali the poet remained under the tutelage of Sheikh Muazzam an eminent teacher of Agra in those days When Ghalib was fourteen years old an Iranian scholar Mulla Abdul Samad by name came to Agra, in the course of his peregrinations Originally he belonged to a Parsi family and before his conversion to Islam was known as Hurmuzd He stayed with Ghalib for two years in Agra and then for sometime in Delhi Ghalib says that he owes his command of the Persian language to this Iranian traveller and has paid him rich tributes in his writings Mulla Abdul Samad was also very fond of his pupil and gave him the full benefit

of his learning The two maintained contact through correspondence even after the Iranian had left India

At the age of thirteen, Ghalib married Umrao Begum, the eleven year old daughter of Mirza Ilahi Baksh Khan, who was the younger brother of Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan Relationship with the Nawab's family had already been established through the marriage of his sister to Ghalib s uncle Though Ghalib had visited Delhi a few times from his seventh year on, his visits to the Moghal capital became more frequent after his marriage for his father in law was a resident of Delhi After another two years (in 1812) Ghalib took a house of his own and settled here for good Association with the Nawab family enabled him to move among the elite of the city and get acquainted with the leading litterateurs of the day Mirza Ilahi Baksh Khan Maruf was also a poet and has left behind a collection of ghazals in Urdu, entitled *Diwan i Maruf* Maruf too seems to have influenced to some extent the natural bent of his son in law Though the palmy days of Moghal splendour were a thing of the past when Ghalib came and settled in Delhi, in the literary world there was still a good deal of activity going on Eminent poets of this period included the great court poet Sheikh Ibrahim Khan Zauq, Momin Khan Momin, Shah Nasir and the King himself who wrote ghazals under the *nom de plume* of Zafar

Another man of letters who deeply influenced Ghalib's early life was Maulvi Fazal Huq Khairabadi He not only enjoyed great moral stature but also was a giant among intellectuals He dissuaded Ghalib from following the much beaten track of writing cheap love lyrics and put him on the road that set him apart as a poet of distinction

Though devoted to the study of literature and writing of poetry from a very young age, Ghalib could not altogether escape from the enticements of the affluent society to which he belonged After the death of his father and uncle, there was nobody to exercise restraint on his youthful escapades The atmosphere in the house of his maternal grandfather

where he was brought up had been one of indulgence towards him and his brother on account of their having been orphaned at a tender age With plenty of money and nobody to ask questions, it was only natural that the young poet should try to get a kick out of life the way sons of unusually rich families did Besides he had a tall handsome figure and robust health with the princely garments adding to the charm of his personality In a letter to Munshi Shiv Narain whose father was a friend of Ghalib the poet writes that when he was about twenty years old they stayed awake late into the night, playing chess and indulging in scandal talk In another letter he confesses that as a young man he was under the spell of a dancing girl of low caste (*Domani*) Consoling Mirza Hatim Ali Mehr, on the death of his beloved Ghalib writes

'A poet achieves perfection when he becomes Firdausi The greatest mendicant is one who rubs shoulders with Hasan Basri The proof of being a lover is that one should behave like a Majnu Laila died before Majnu Your beloved also died before you In fact you are greater than Majnu inas much as Laila died in *her* house whereas your beloved died in *your* house Brother the sons of Moghals are a dreadful lot They 'kill the person for whom they would die I too am a Moghal s son In my life I also 'killed a terribly cruel *Domani* May God bestow peace on both of them May He also pardon the two of us who have been hurt by the death of our beloveds

Ghalib also alludes to the death of his beloved in one of his early ghazals

Sharm i ruswai se ja chhupna naqab i khak men
Khatam hai ulfat ki tujh par pardadari hae hae

(Fear of disgrace has made you hide behind the veil of dust Ah the limit to love s secrecy!)

The couplet gives credence to the belief that the girl con cerned had committed suicide and left the poet heartbroken This however had been only a brief interlude in Ghalib s

life There is nothing on record to show that he had any other affair

Ghalib s domestic life was not at all happy For one thing he was married at an age when he had *no* say *in* the matter of choosing his partner On top of it, while he had a penchant for licentious living, his wife was an extremely religious woman strictly following the tenets of the faith, e g fasting and praying The ways of the two had been so different that they were never known to have sat at one table, or together, for a meal In fact they even kept two different sets of utensils which they did not share with each other Unfortunately, Umrao Begum had no taste for literary values and could not appreciate her husband s poetical talent or the subtleties of his expression Their marriage therefore, seems to have remained at best a tie of duty and convention It only added to the feeling of solitude in the poet s heart

Ghalib could sometimes be extremely uncharitable when referring to his wife About his marriage he says "On Rajab 7 1225 (Islamic calendar) I was ordered to undergo life sentence A chain that is my wife was tied round my feet and I was thrown into the city of Delhi declared a prison About his unhappiness in wedded life there are in his writings a few allusions half cynical and half humorous Consoling a friend on the loss of his wife, Ghalib is on record to have written that he envied those whose wives died in their lifetime and then goes on to say that in his own case far from there being any prospect of his release from the yoke, his mate for life had never had so much as a headache!

All this does not, however mean that Ghalib actually hated his wife It was in his nature to make fun of everything and everybody and in this he did not spare even his wife his relatives and intimate friends or even the King who enjoyed the poet s digs Nobody minded his witticisms whose object was more to amuse than to disparage their targets Quite frequently he aimed his remarks at himself His only lament was that his life partner, being illiterate lacked the

intelligence to appreciate his verses or his talent Even so he showed her and her relatives the utmost courtesy Though he mostly passed his time in the men s apartment where he sat slept and took his meals he made it a point to visit the ladies of the house at least once in a day

Besides this incompatibility of temperament between the husband and wife there was another reason for Ghalib to feel unhappy in the domestic sphere This was the death of all the seven children to which his wife gave birth They all died in their infancy leaving the parents lonely and heart broken Writing to a friend who had sustained the loss of a child Ghalib says 'I have learnt with great sorrow that you have lost your recently born son Ask me what it is to lose a child During the 74 years (according to the Islamic calendar) of my life I had seven children boys as well as girls none of whom lived to be older than 15 months You are still young and need not despair May God grant you the patience to bear this loss and favour you with something better'

A few years before the Mutiny had died at a young age Umrao Begum s nephew Zainul Abdin Khan Arif, leaving behind two minor sons Baqar Ali and Husain Ali Ghalib and his wife took upon themselves the responsibility of bringing up the orphans They loved them as though they were their own flesh and spared no effort or expense to make them comfortable The poet took them with him in his palanquin wherever he went Unfortunately, both of them died young not long after the poet s death About his fondness for them he writes to Munshi Har Gopal Tafta one of his best pupils as thus 'You know Zainul Abdin was like a son to me He has left two children who are my grandsons They often come to me and trouble me in various ways but I do not mind the trouble God knows that I regard you as my son and *your* poems the children of your genius as *my* spiritual grandsons When I do not get tired of my grandsons earthly, who come and interrupt my

dinner and interfere with my sleep at noon and step on to my bed with their dusty bare feet and spill water here and raise a cloud of dust there, why should I get tired of my grandsons spiritual that give me no trouble at all ?

Tafta was a remarkable man completely devoted to his mentor He admired Ghalib so much that he called himself Mirza Tafta He too has left behind a big diwan of his Persian poems

Ghalib had a very large circle of friends among whom were many Nawabs and the elite of Delhi His congenial nature and habit of cutting jokes made him so popular that everybody sought his company A person who met him once would pine to see him again and again To Ghalib it gave immense pleasure to entertain visiting friends He shared their joys and sorrows like an intimate His pupils submitted their verses to him for correction and improvement as was the time honoured custom among poets in the East He never disappointed them by not attending to their requests Even in his old age when he was troubled by various infirmities, he took pains over this labour of love and retouched every piece sent to him with a regularity and punctuality which could not be expected even of a paid teacher No one ever informed Ghalib of his difficulties without eliciting from him a sympathetic response He helped several of his needy friends with money even though he himself was not financially well off He did not mind if anybody sent him a letter with no postage on it but protested if some one enclosed a stamp for the reply In his dealings with friends, and others who came to see him Ghalib was a model of humility But side by side he had a great sense of self respect and love of independence, in the tradition of a true Oriental of noble birth

Ghalib was completely free from any religious bigotry or racial prejudice He believed in God and had faith in Islam though he rarely followed the rituals prescribed by it Never

prayed, never fasted He had broad sympathies and respect for all people to whichever caste or creed they belonged In a letter to Tafta he says I hold all human beings whether Musalman Hindu or Christian dear to me and regard them as my brothers Ghalib also sailed clear of the Shia Sunni controversy among the Muslims In one of his ghazals he says

Ham muwahid hain hamara kesh hai tark i rasum
Millaten jab mit gaeen aj a i eeman ho gaeen

(We are believers in the unity of God Our religion is the renunciation of convention When they disappear sects become parts of faith become one)

Ghalib had no doctrinaire philosophy He had an open mind He believed in unfettered freedom for the mind and unflinching reverence for life Though he believed in the final day of Judgement (Mahshar) not infrequently he would make fun of ideas like heaven and hell There is a very popular couplet on this

Ham ko maaloom hai jannat ki haqiqat lekin
Dil ke khush rakhne ko Ghalib ye khayal achha hai

(We know the reality about Paradise but it is a good idea to humour the mind)

However Ghalib was fully conscious of his personal shortcomings and made no attempt to hide them On the contrary, very often he alludes to them in his writings in prose as well as verse He does so in a way that shows that he is sorry for these deficiencies While describing his negligence of religious practices he is often inclined to paint him self darker than he really is This may be due to his latitudinarianism weighing heavily on his mind or his inclination to be emphatic in expressions of humour according to the peculiar needs of the occasion inspiring such remarks Then there was this common heritage of Oriental poets to resort to exaggeration without rhyme or reason

Ghalib relished good food and ate well, except in old age when most of the time he remained unwell He was particularly fond of meat grapes and mangoes He could not do without meat even for a day In the morning he took pounded almonds mixed in candy juice The lunch consisted of two or three meat dishes with lot of gravy, eggs yolk a little curd and one chapati Sometimes he preferred rice to chapati In the evening he took a few pieces of kabab He generally missed the night meal A fancy hubble bubble was a constant companion It was emptied and refilled three or four times in a day Strangely he avoided chewing a *pan*

Ghalib dressed like an aristocrat Though himself by no means rich he generally moved among nobles and Nawabs At home he remained in loose kurta of fine mulmul and cotton *pyjamas* and an embroidered round cap on the head In winter he changed over to tight woollen trousers and *mirzai* (quilted jacket) Moving out he would put on an expensive gown pointed shoes and a pointed fourcornered cap in hand he carried a sturdy stick He would also throw a big scarf around the shoulders Sometimes he tied the Moghal style turban round a kulah (conic cap) He once wrote to a friend (Munshi Jawahar Singh) to send a silken *lungi* (a length of cloth which can be worn both as a turban and dhoti) as was used in Multan and Peshawar, giving a detailed description of his requirements

In his young days, Ghalib had his face shaved but sported long cut hair on the head In old age he grew a beard but had it regularly cut to prevent it from giving him the appearance of a maulvi He also developed a stoop on account of his tallness and ill health

Ghalib did not stick to one house throughout his stay in Delhi nor did he buy or build one When he moved to Delhi from Agra after marriage he stayed at his father in law s place but soon shifted to a rented house He changed his residence as soon as he got tired of one place but mostly remained in Gali Qasim Jan of Mohalla Ballimaran near

Chandni Chowk The rent ranged from four to six rupees a month The last house he occupied and where he died was adjacent to a mosque He wrote a verse on this

> *Masjid ke zer i saya ik ghar bana liya hai*
> *Ye banda i kameena hamsaya i Khuda hai*

(Ghalib has taken residence under the shadow of a mosque *This humble man is now a neighbour of God*)

At no time Ghalib had fewer than five servants including a maid who helped the ladies with their chores One of the servants was a Hindu Their total wages came to twenty five rupees a month The male attendants accompanied him when he went on a journey He always travelled in a palanquin carried on shoulders by four men He was very generous to his attendants and others who needed to be tipped Nobody who approached him with a request ever went back empty handed Many needy persons among whom quite a few were blind and cripple, were regular visitors to his house After the Mutiny his income had considerably fallen and he was meeting his expenses by borrowing money from various sources at times on heavy rates of interest Even so, he continued his largesse When his pension from the Government treasury had been restored he was presented a seven piece dress and three gold mohurs at a durbar by the Lieutenant Governor The Governor s peons and other petty officials as was the custom, came to Ghalib for tips Since he had no money at the moment he asked them to wait in a room and meanwhile sent the gifts he had received to the bazar to be sold From the sale proceeds he tipped the Government officials

A once rich friend who too had suffered in the Mutiny came to Ghalib wearing a coat made from very cheap cloth The poet was overwhelmed by sympathy but hiding his feeling asked Where did you buy this cloth ? It is an excellent design and I would like to have a jacket made of it for me " The visitor told him that he had worn it for the first time and

offered to spare it if Ghalib was so keen to have it Ghalib said "I wish I could take it from you but as it is very cold, how will you go back without a coat? Then he looked about the room and took his new woollen gown off the hook and exchanged it for the friend s coat

In a letter Ghalib laments his not being rich enough to wipe out poverty and misery at least from the city in which he lived, if not from the world as a whole ' I am that *beggar* going from door to door who cannot tolerate the sight of anybody asking for alms he says

Ghalib kept a number of pet animals and birds—a horse, a cat a peacock pigeons turtles sheep and goats

In old age Ghalib often wished for death, probably because his life had been a hard struggle against suffering and sorrow and also because he was weighed down by various ailments

Ho chukin Ghalib balaen sab tamam
Ek marg i nagahani aur hai

(Ghalib has suffered all possible troubles The only thing that now remains to come is sudden death)

And when he was despaired of waiting, he would recite this line

Ai marg i nagahani tujhe intezar kya hai
(Wherefore, O sudden death you wait and wish?)

One of his most popular ghazals contains verses which show how unhappy he had become in later life

Koyee umeed bar nahin aati
Koyee soorat nazar nahin aati
Aage aati thi haal i dil par hansi
Ab kisi baat par nahin aati
Maut ka ek din moyayyan hai
Neend kyon raat bhar nahin aati
Marte hain aarzoo men marne ki
Maut aati hai par nahin aati

(No hope appears to be fulfilled and there seems to be no way out. I used to laugh at the state of my mind but now nothing makes me smile. A day is irrevocably fixed for death, then why should I not have a comfortable sleep in the night? I am pining for death but death though round the corner manages to elude.)

Ghalib remained ill for a long time. He suffered from constipation ever since adolescence. In 1859 he had a severe attack of colic pain and continued to suffer from this disease for the rest of his life. The lascivious living of the younger days also had its effect on his health. His tragic return journey from a visit to Rampur in 1865 when due to a mishap he had to pass a cold night of the month of December without adequate woollens finally broke down his resistance to physical ailments. In a letter dated 25th of August 1867, to a friend, Ghalib tells a pathetic tale about his growing disabilities and apologises for being unable to write to his friends as he used to. He says: "I got both your letters but could not reply to them. Until now I was used to writing while lying in bed but it is not possible to do that any more. My hands tremble and my sight is failing. There is no scribe in my employ. I can only get letters written by a friend from dictation. You must take me for one on the eve of departure from this world. How can newspapermen realise what I have been reduced to? The two local papers *Akmalul Akhbar* and *Ashraful Akhbar* know something about my present condition and I have asked them to publish a full statement about my difficulties and to request my correspondents not to expect from me either replies to their letters or suggestions on their exercises in poetry. They did publish this but no one seems to have paid any heed to my request. Letters are still pouring in from all directions followed by reminders for replies. Verses are also still being sent to me for correction. I cannot cope with this work and I feel ashamed. Old and decrepit, totally deaf and half blind, I am lying in the bed like a block day and night."

In this letter, Ghalib also refers to the persistent demand

of his admirers for a copy of his photograph but expresses his inability to visit a studio He says An Indian photographer who was my friend has left this place There is an Englishman who takes photographs but where is the strength in me to get down from the upper storey of my house and to get into the palanquin to go to his studio to sit and wait in a chair for an hour or more and to return home alive after this torture ? He could not, however, resist the friends request and was photographed before his death

In another letter dated 15th February, 1867, Ghalib gives a similar description of his old age "In Urdu they speak of the age of seventy or seventy two as an equivalent of dotage I am now seventy three and therefore more than a dotard My memory now, well—as if it had never been there ! My hearing had drummed long ago but now the sense of if too has disappeared like my memory For more than a month it has been usual for friends, who come to see me to write down on paper whatever they have got to say after the usual salutations My food remains now next to nothing In the morning I take a little milk of powdered almonds mixed with sugar at noon some soup, in the evening four fried kababs and at bed time a little wine (equivalent to the weight of five rupees) mixed with rose water of equal quantity Thus you will see I am an absolutely useless old fogey being crushed to death by sins

Maulana Hali, who visited Ghalib a day before his death, found him unconscious Yet regaining consciousness after a long interval he dictated the following reply to a letter from Nawab Allaudin Ahmed Khan ' Why do you inquire from me about my condition ? Wait for a day or so and then ask these neighbours, they will give you the news

Ghalib had stopped moving out of his residence for two years before his death Most of the time he lay in bed His hands trembled Several times in the day he would fall unconscious At long last arrived the day for which he had been waiting so impatiently and for which he had composed

the following couplet

Dam i wapsin bar sar i rah hai
A i o ab Allah hi Allah hai

(The last breath is waiting on the road O dear ones I now see nothing but God)

A few hours before he passed away Ghalib expressed a desire to eat something Then he asked the servant to bring to his bed Baqar Ali Khan s daughter (Ghalib s grandniece) whom he used to fondle As she was asleep the servant did not bring her and told Ghalib about it 'I shall take food when she comes so saying he turned on his side and entered a state of coma The hakims attending on him declared that there had been a brain haemorrhage All efforts to revive him proved futile In the afternoon, next day on February 15th 1869 the greatest of ghazal masters breathed his last

When the body was taken out for burial there developed a controversy as to how it should be done—according to the Shia rites or to Sunni ? Nawab Ziaudin Ahmed Khan and Hakim Mahmud Khan ruled that Ghalib was a Sunni and hence all rites were performed in keeping with the Sunni tradition All Delhi had turned out to join the funeral procession and tears streamed down the cheeks of many The heavens seemed to sigh as the body was laid to rest near the sacred shrine of Sultan ul Aulia Hazrat Nizamudin sharing that privilege with Amir Khusro

For a whole year Delhi s Urdu newspapers and other journals kept publishing elegies and eulogies in which Ghalib s numerous admirers from all over the country expressed their feelings about the irreparable loss which Urdu literature had suffered by his death

Ghalib s passing away was a bolt from the blue for his wife The pension from the British Government as well as the stipend from Rampur stopped Some of the debts the poet had incurred remained to be cleared There was no source from which the household expenses could be met

Umrao Begum made frantic efforts for a maintenance allowance from the Government which agreed to give her a monthly pension of ten rupees on condition that she receive it personally in the court To this she did not agree All this had an unsettling effect on her already weak health Exactly one year after the poet s death, on the day when the people were preparing to observe his death anniversary, she passed away and was buried by his side

2

FIGHT FOR PENSION

Poets in the past particularly those of the Orient, depended *for their livelihood on the munificence of their patrons or* pensions and grants from the royal court They did not work for a living in the modern sense of the word If someone was a poet he was a wholetime poet and would do no more than write poetry He thought it an unbecoming act to be a trader, a farmer or a physician along with being a poet He would rather suffer and starve than serve a master except by eulogizing his virtues or satirizing his rivals in verse

The only work a poet gladly accepted to do was to correct or improve the compositions of noblemen who sometimes included the king or his heirs For this he was handsomely paid But not all deserving poets were fortunate to be so commissioned Only the top notchers with strings to pull could win such favours

The day had not dawned yet when good literary work could find a market for itself and when special patronage could be replaced by general support of the public The publishing trade a hundred years ago was not even a fraction of what it is today and the authors however high their rank got little by way of royalty or profits from the sale of their books As a result most Oriental poets passed their days in

penury, living in the filthiest surroundings and suffering priva tions, yet not trying to supplement their income by doing some work that would bring them adequate remuneration

Mirza Ghalib, besides writing verses and letters, which are as good literary gems as his ghazals spent most of his time and energy fighting his pension battle At this distant date it looks rather preposterous that such a talented poet should have to go from one nobleman to another, from one obdurate official to another, pleading his case for a sum that seems so insignificant to us However, the fact remains that Ghalib was obsessed with the idea of collecting lots of money through pensions grants and stipends It is difficult to agree with most of the criticism that Dr Syed Abdul Latif has made of Ghalib s compositions in his book, '*Ghalib A Critical Appreciation Of His Life And Urdu Poetry* but one the feels like echoing his view that Ghalib "had great gifts vouch safed to him which he threw away in his search for the mamman He neither enjoyed the peace of mind he so much longed for nor attained distinction commensurate with his high abilities

Ghalib began receiving a pension from the Government not because he was a poet but on account of the services his uncle Mirza Nasrullah Beg Khan, had rendered to the British rulers Nasrullah Beg was the Subedar of Akbarabad on be half of the Mahrattas under the command of French General Perron In 1803, the British forces under General Lake attack ed this territory and Nasrullah Beg surrendered the city without a fight Nasrullah Beg s brother in law, Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan also exercised a good deal of influence with the British He had helped General Lake in several expeditions and enjoyed his confidence It is therefore be- lieved that the surrender of Akbarabad without a battle was a pre arranged affair

In 1806 the Akbarabad Subedar's jurisdiction changed into that of a Commissioner appointed by the British authori ties under General Lake The General asked Ghalib s uncle

or another

One of the beneficiaries of the pension agreement on the death of Nasrullah Beg was Khwaja Haji, who received Rs 2,000 per annum out of the total amount of Rs 5,000 distributed among the deceased s heirs He was an officer in the British army and a descendant of Tursam Khan s family Tursam Khan, a scion of the famous seljuk dynasty of Turkey, was the great grandfather of Ghalib Ghalib, however denied any relationship between Khawja Haji and Nasrullah Beg Since Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan had accepted the fact of the relationship and was also responsible for apportioning the shares of the various claimants to the pension Ghalib did not press his point He was however, assured that on the death of Khwaja Haji, the sum of Rs 2,000 would pass on to him and his brother Another reason which held back Ghalib from pursuing his protest against the 'inequitable' distribution of the pension was that his father in law, Mirza Ilahi Baksh Khan Maruf was brother of Nawab Ahmed Baksh His action would have created ill will between the two brothers which Ghalib wanted to avoid

Khwaja Haji died in 1825 and Ghalib s father in law passed away a year later But contrary to the oral understanding given to the poet Haji s Rs 2,000 was given to his two sons This naturally upset Ghalib The dilatory tactics of Nawab Shamsudin further embittered him To add to his troubles Yousaf Khan became insane at the prime of his age Ghalib s creditors, noticing his deteriorating financial condition also began to harass him Consequently, he decided to send a formal petition to the British Government in the matter of his pension rights but before doing so he wanted to make a last attempt to persuade Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan to set matters right by using his influence He went to Loharu for this purpose Of his meeting with the Nawab, Ghalib writes

> 'I said to Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan 'you should now fulfil your promise and the right to pension should go to the true heirs Or permit me to take my case to the

(British) authorities in Calcutta Those days the Nawab Sahib had suffered several blows He had just got up from his sick bed Besides, he had lost his attorneyship of the State of Alwar This had made him extremely sad and depressed He started crying even hiccupping before me and said, 'you are my child and the light of my eyes You see what blows I have suffered and what hardships I am facing I have been deprived of my right Above all my friendship with General Ochterlony (British Resident at Delhi) has broken up Be patient for some time more You will get your full right

'General Ochterlony died shortly thereafter It was announced that Sir Charles Metcalfe would fill his post Nawab Sahib assured me that as soon as Sir Charles *arrived he would introduce me to him and also would tell* him about the relations between my uncle and the British authorities so that the right person got his claim Not only that he would get separate sanads (certificates) for each of the five claimants so that after his (Nawab s) death they might have no difficulty in getting the money from his descendants

"After Sir Charles Metcalfe s arrival arose the Bharatpur tangle He got busy in saving Raja Baldev Singh and punishing the rebels Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan too was going there He asked me to accompany him I was worried in those days on account of my brother s illness Moreover the creditors were harassing me with their persistent demands I was therefore unwilling to undertake the journey However in the hope that I shall get an opportunity to pay my respects to Metcalfe Sahib I left my brother who was running high fever and was in a delirium in the care of four persons Making all sorts of promises to some of the creditors eluding others under a disguise and carrying nothing with me I accompanied the Nawab to Bharatpur But in spite of my repeated requests he did not introduce me to Sir Charles

Metcalfe In the meantime, the Nawab suffered a stroke of paralysis in the face Following a treatment given him by Dr Duncan he recovered and returned to Ferozepore Sir Charles too stayed at Ferozepore for three days Nawab Sahib did not present me before him though I was daily requesting him to do so

' When Sir Charles returned to Delhi, I became thoroughly disgusted with Ahmed Baksh Khan I then thought that justice loving officers were always mindful of their own men Why should I seek the good offices of Ahmed Baksh Khan? Why should I not personally explain all my difficulties to Sir Charles without anybody s recommendation? But it was impossible for me to go to Delhi for fear of the hue and cry that my creditors would raise I was concerned about my honour Hence I gave up the idea

"Meanwhile, news spread of the arrival of the Gover nor General Undoubtedly Sir Charles Metcalfe would go receive him I therefore decided to go to Kanpur and return from there in his company On the way I might get a chance to see him and relate my plight, my helplessness and my troubles on account of my debts and then ask for justice With this object in mind I left for Farrukhabad and Kanpur As soon as I reached Kanpur, I fell ill so that I could not even move out of the bed There was no competent physician in this town and I had to go to Lucknow across the Ganga in a hired palanquin Here I remained bed ridden for more than five months I heard the news of the arrival of the Governor General and of the Shah of Oudh going to receive him but I was not fit to leave my bed In short Lucknow s climate did not suit me at all

From Lucknow Ghalib went to Banda where he stayed with Nawab Zulfiqar Ali for six months They were related to each other from Ghalib's mother s side The Nawab took good care of the poet and arranged for his medical treatment

Ghalib soon recovered from his illness He writes "The rains had now ended and the Governor General also had returned to Calcutta I did not have the courage to go to Delhi from Ferozepore Then how dare I go there from Banda? Moreover, I thought the law is the same in Delhi and Calcutta and I better leave the whole matter to the good sense of the authorities '

As his health did not permit a journey by boat Ghalib left for Calcutta on horseback When he reached Murshidabad he received the news of the death of Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan This dampened his spirits because he thought that if and when he won his pension case he would not be able to boast before his friends of having inflicted the humiliation of defeat on a powerful adversary

Ghalib reached Calcutta on February 21 1828, and took a house on rent in the Simla Bazar area (this bazar no longer exists) On April 28 of the same year he submitted his petition to the Governor General in Council He was told that it should first be filed with the Resident at Delhi It was impossible for Ghalib to go back to Delhi for this purpose and then return to Calcutta to pursue the application He therefore continued to stay in Calcutta and engaged a lawyer to take up his case in Delhi He also managed to have himself recommended to the Resident by an English army officer posted at Calcutta The Resident (now Sir Edward Cool brooke) supported Ghalib s claim and returned the file to the head office after 10 months

All this while the poet continued to stay in Calcutta unfortunately for him Sir Edward was removed from service on a charge of corruption and defalcation of money His place was taken by Francis Hawkins who was a friend of Nawab Shamsudin Ahmed Khan At the Nawab s instance a second report was sent to the head office with the observation that Ghalib was not entitled to more than Rs 750 per annum which he was getting Ghalib was however confident of winning the case because he thought it was based on truth

This belief was further strengthened by the extremely nice treatment he received at the hands of the English officers in Calcutta particularly from the Secretary of the Persian Langu age Department, Mr Andrew Sterling, in whose praise the poet had written a qasida

Ghalib s high spirits in Calcutta were in sharp contrast to the state of his mind when he had left Delhi At that time he was so disgusted that he wanted to leave India and spend the rest of his life in the taverns of Shiraz But now no such thought crossed his mind About Calcutta he writes 'There is no other city like this on the surface of the earth To lie on bare land here is much better than be the ruler of some other place By God, had I been a bachelor and free from domestic worries and responsibilities I would have renounced everything and settled here for good"

Ghalib waited and waited but when he saw no sign of a decision on his petition he willy nilly decided to return to Delhi so that with his influence there he could have a more favourable report sent to the head office He engaged a lawyer to watch his interests in Calcutta and after a stay of nearly three years left the city on 29th November, 1829

Ghalib s case in brief was like this The present pension was inadequate and had not been properly distributed, Khwaja Haji or his heirs should not get a share out of this pension Originally the amount of pension stipulated was Rs 10 000 per annum and not Rs 5 000 as had actually been distributed all these years after deducting the amount already paid the balance should be made over to Nasrullah Beg s descendants (three sisters and two nephews, namely, Ghalib and Yousaf), each descendant s share should be determined *de novo* *each recipient should be* given a separate document, and in future the amounts of pensions should be disbursed through the British treasury at Delhi and not through the Nawab

Since Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan was dead the case on his behalf was being contested by his son Nawab Shamsudin

Ahmed Khan In his reply to Ghalib's petition, the defendent produced a letter dated 7th June 1806 and purported to have been written by Lord Lake to Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan in which the total amount of the pension to Nasrullah Beg s descendants was given as Rs 5 000 This letter came to Ghalib as a bolt from the blue He had no knowledge of the existence of such a letter and therefore challenged its authenticity He alleged that it was a forged document and the signature was not in Lord Lake's handwriting Moreover there was no copy or any mention of this letter in the Government records Sir John Malcolm who was now the Governor of Bombay was Lord Lake s secretary during the period when the above letter was said to have been written Hence it was sent to him for verification Unfortunately for Ghalib Sir John Malcolm replied that the signature on the letter was of Lord Lake He added that Nawab Ahmed Baksh Khan was a very respectable person and Lord Lake had fully trusted him It was therefore most unlikely that the Nawab would forge a letter Had he done this there would have been some more simlar complaints against him

On the basis of Sir John Malcolm s evidence the decision in the case went against Ghalib and on 27th January 1831 he was told that the Governor General in Council was not prepared to make any changes in the existing pension arrangement In brief, his petition was dismissed Ghalib made several appeals and also brought pressure to bear upon the Government to get its decision revised but all his attempts proved of no avail

In the meantime a dispute arose between Nawab Shamsudin Ahmed Khan and his two younger brothers Aminudin and Riazudin over the distribution of their father s estate i e Ferozepore Jhirka and Loharu The matter was referred by the Resident at Delhi Mr William Frazer, to the head office in Calcutta Ghalib s sympathies were with the younger brothers and he gave them letters of introduction when they went to Calcutta to press their claims The issue was decided

in their favour Nawab Shamsudin resented Ghalib s action and stopped payment of his pension in April 1831

On March 22 1835, Mr William Frazer was shot dead while returning from a dinner at Raja Kishangarh s residence in Daryagunj Delhi In this connection two servants of Nawab Shamsudin were arrested The Nawab himself was summoned to Delhi and placed under house arrest In the course of the trial it was discovered that he had a hand in the murder He nursed a grudge against Mr Frazer for having deprived him of part of his estate by siding with his younger brothers Mr Frazer was also very friendly towards Ghalib Nawab Shamsudin and one of his servants (the other had turned approver) were sentenced to death and hanged outside Kashmere Gate

In the meantime due to the stoppage of his pension by Nawab Shamsudin, Ghalib had run into heavy debts which he could not repay He was sued by two of his creditors and a decree for Rs 5 000 was passed against him in February 1835 According to the prevailing practice if a debtor happened to be a man of status, he could not be arrested except from outside his residence for non payment of the decreed amount The result was that Ghalib stayed indoors throughout the day At night however he would move out to meet his friends among whom was the City Magistrate This was also the magistrate who was trying the accused in the Frazer murder case Some people suspected that Ghalib was acting as an informer on behalf of the magistrate The accusation was, however unjustified as the poet and the magistrate were old friends whereas the murder was a recent event Ghalib had several friends among the English officers who held him in high esteem on account of his eminence as a man of letters

After Nawab Shamsudin s execution and the forfeiture of his estate Ghalib began getting his pension directly from the Delhi Collector s office He however, continued to press his claim for raising its value The Lieutenant Governor of North West India rejected his latest appeal and told him that

there could be no addition to the sum of Rs 750 which he was receiving Another revision petition met the same fate But Ghalib was not to be silenced While wondering at his avidity—a thing least expected from a poet—one must admire him for his doggedness and courage of conviction On the one hand Ghalib was a spendthrift always ready to part with the last pice in his pocket, while on the other hand his behaviour appears to be highly parsimonious and unrelenting when it came to realising his own dues Any other person in his place would have thought of some alternative source of income rather than suffer the ignominy of a claim being rejected again and again In fact, when Ghalib returned from Calcutta in 1833, he was in so dire need of money that he seriously considered taking employment in some Princely State but his sense of pride ultimately prevailed and he gave up the idea What he desired was that a patron who appreciated his art should himself come to him and offer assistance Such patrons were as rare in those days as they are today

In November 1836 Ghalib submitted a new application demanding that his pension case be referred to the Directors of the East India Company in England and pending their decision he should be given Rs 3 000 per annum He calculated his arrears of pension from 1806 to 1836 at Rs 2 03 000 and demanded that the same might be paid to him from the amount of Rs 2,60 000 which Nawab Shamsudin had deposited in the British treasury All his applications were summarily rejected The Directors of the Company in England also gave their ruling against him and declared that *the decision taken in India by the Governor General in* Council was the right decision In a final bid Ghalib sent a petition to Queen Victoria but this too brought him no relief and in 1844 after having been disappointed from all sides he called it a day

The case took altogether sixteen years (1828 to 1844) During this period Ghalib incurred heavy debts to pay his lawyers and to meet other expenses in connection with his

petitions He did not hesitate to borrow money at high rates of interest In 1835, when a decree for Rs 5,000 was passed against him, his total debt stood at Rs 40,000 He was absolutely confident that in the end he would come out victorious and receive a huge amount as arrears of pension with which he would easily clear his debts But this was not to be In the process, however, he was given certain positions and privileges which were more in the nature of a sop to his pride than of any material benefit to him He was entitled to a seat in the tenth position at all durbars, besides the gift of a seven piece dress and a three piece jewellery

Ghalib s difficulties were not limited to money matters He had a weakness for gambling Probably it too stemmed from the financial stringency as is often the case His friends gathered at his house and played chess and *chausar* Money was generally perhaps generously too, staked at these games The officials in charge of law and order ordinarily overlooked such activities if responsible and influential citizens were involved in them However, in 1841 the city got a police superintendent who was serious and unsparing in his duties One night he raided Ghalib s house and arrested the poet and his friends on a charge of gambling The court fined them all Ghalib was asked to pay a fine of Rs 100 or in the alternative to undergo four months imprisonment Apparently he chose to pay up

But worse was yet to come The poet and his friends continued to indulge in gambling despite their unpleasant experience In this connection Maulana Abul Kalam Azad writes in his book *Naqsh I Azad*

' In those days Ghalib s residence had become a regular gambling den Certain jewellers of Chandni Chowk were habitual gamblers Ghalib too was fond of *chausar* from the very beginning All of them gathered at his house and indulged in gambling As long as Mohamed

Mirza Khan alias Mirza Khani was the city Kotwal these people had nothing to be afraid of since he was a close friend and admirer of Ghalib He was succeeded by Faizul Hasan Khan who was not only unacquainted with these people but also was somewhat of a stern nature God alone knows why he developed enmity towards Ghalib Besides, the authorities were keen to check the growing evil of gambling in the city One day the Kotwal accompanied by a posse of armed police in a horse drawn carriage, arrived at Ghalib s house The word was sent in that there were some lady visitors As a result nobody stopped them from entering the house When the reality dawned on the gamblers they offered some resistance and the police had to use force and beat up a few of them Ghalib was hauled up for running the gambling den The case came before Magistrate Kanwar Wazir Ali Khan King Bahadur Shah wrote a personal letter to the Resident Many noblemen also interceded with the authorities in a determined bid to save Ghalib from the disgrace of punishment but all these appeals and efforts proved of no avail The Sessions Judge who heard the appeal upheld the judgment of the subordinate court sentencing the accused to six months rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 200 He ruled that in the event of Ghalib s failure to pay the fine he was to remain in jail for another six months but the rigour of this additional sentence would be condoned if the accused paid an extra Rs 50 as fine However Ghalib was released at the expiry of three months on the report of Delhi s Civil Surgeon

Referring to this episode, *Ghalib writes in a Persian* letter (translated by Maulana Hali into Urdu)

'The Kotwal was my enemy and the Magistrate did not know me In spite of the fact that the Magistrate was an officer above the Kotwal, he became his sub

ordinate in my case and passed the order for my imprisonment The Sessions Judge too, despite the fact that he was a friend and always treated me in a friendly and kindly manner and was informal at several get to gethers connived at and showed indifference in the matter An appeal was filed with the central authori ties but nobody paid any heed and the sentence was up held Then for some reason an order came for my release from the head office after I had undergone half the sentence

Every effort was made to make Ghalib s life in jail as comfortable as possible Food clothes and all other neces sary articles were carried to him from his house There were no restrictions on visits by relatives and friends Nawab Mustafa Khan Shefta spent long hours with Ghalib in jail every alternate day He also met the entire cost of the case on his behalf The Nawab exerted all his influence to get him released Ghalib has made touching references to Shefta s help and sympathy in his verses

The detention had a deep effect on Ghalib's mind apart from the big jolt it gave to his honour and esteem The Persian verses he composed in prison carry the imprint of his chastened and melancholy mood On release, he wrote

> ' I consider that everything that happens is ordained by God and one cannot fight against the Almighty I am now free from the ignominy of what has happened and ready to accept what is yet to come But to desire is not against the service of God I now wish to leave this world but if I am to live any more I do not want to live in Hindustan There is Rome there is Egypt, there is Iran and there is Baghdad Leave alone even these There is the Ka aba itself a shelter for the free and the abode of hermits May the mercy of God be upon it Let us see when I am released from the curse of penury which is worse than the jail term that I have served Before deciding upon a destination, I would

like to walk into the wilderness This is what has passed and this is what I wish '

The outbreak of the Mutiny in May 1857 interrupted the payment of even the meagre pension which Ghalib was getting from the Delhi Collector s office When peace was restored Ghalib made frantic efforts to get it revived but the Government at that time had more important matters to attend to than bother about the pension of a poet It was however, decided in March 1859 that all those persons who had been receiving pensions and stipends from the Government before the Mutiny should be paid money equivalent to their one year s claim as a special help The balance would be paid after all inquiries had been completed Ghalib however, was given only Rs 100 instead of his yearly pension of Rs 750 When he protested against this, he was told that in the case of others it might take a long time to settle their claims but he was very shortly to get all his accumulated pension since May 1857 The promise and the expectation, however, did not materialize

Nawab Yousaf Ali Khan had invited Ghalib to Rampur soon after the British reoccupied Delhi but the poet delayed his departure from the city in the hope of getting his pension resumed The Nawab waited until April 1859 and then renewed his invitation to Ghalib The latter replied

I understand that the Governor General Lord Canning who is in Calcutta has sent for my pension file The papers have been sent to the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab who will forward them to Calcutta The order sanctioning the pension will come from there via Punjab and I shall get the money The moment I receive the money I shall request you for transport Today arrives the transport tomorrow I start for Rampur

The year passed and there was no sign of the money Ghalib had so keenly been hoping to receive But he did not give up hope When in the beginning of 1860 Lord Canning camped in Delhi after holding a durbar at Meerut,

Ghalib requested for an audience but the Governor General declined to receive him This blow put him out completely and he left for Rampur on 19th January The Nawab made all arrangements for his comfortable stay in Rampur He not only increased his monthly stipend from Rs 100 to Rs 200 but also brought his influence to bear upon the British Government for the restoration of his pension

Ghalib s pension from the Delhi Collector s office was finally restored in May 1860 He had returned to Delhi only a month earlier His arrears totalled Rs 2,150 All this went towards repayment of his debts and he was again left penniless In a letter to Mir Mahdi Majruh, he writes ' The money has come from the treasury May I lose my eyes if I have seen it Only my honour has been saved, my enemies have been silenced, my friends have become happy I shall continue to be as naked and hungry as I am so long as I live

On further representations the Government restored Ghalib s position in the durbar and his claim to a seven piece dress to which he attached considerable importance Originally the honour of a seat had been bestowed upon him in 1828 by Lord William Bentinck The dress was first given him during the reign of Lord Ellenborough (1842 44) In 1856 Ghalib had tried through the good offices of Lord Ellenborough who was particularly kind to him, to get a title from Queen Victoria, and have himself appointed a court poet No decision had been taken on his request when the Mutiny broke out He renewed his plea in 1865 The Government turned it down

Ghalib's frequent efforts to curry favour with the alien rulers in the hope of receiving honours and monetary benefits from them do little credit to a poet of his eminence particularly when there were other avenues open to him to augment his income The native Princes like the Maharaja of Patiala would have generously helped him if he had approached them instead of running after the

British officials Proud as he was of his noble ancestory and position as the leading most poet it is amazing to find that he should have degraded himself by petitioning for small mercies a Government that was held in contempt by the Indian masses But we must concede that those were different times and, though there had been a revolt (mainly confined to the northern region) against the alien rule, the Indians had not by then developed the conscious ness of being one nation They acted more as individuals or regional groups vis a vis the British than as people of one country fighting against an invader Each group or clan that rose in revolt against the forces of the East India Company had a reason different from that of most others Quite a large number of Indians sided with the British What impelled Ghalib to go out of his way to profess loyalty to the foreigners is difficult to guess All that can be said is that whatever the reasons they must have been entirely personal and, of course weighty

3

THE MUTINY AND AFTER

THE middle of the nineteenth century was an extremely turbulent period in Indian history The placid currents of the country s life had been rudely disturbed by the rapid expansion of the British power, attended as it was by changes in the administrative system and modes of existence to which the people had been accustomed down the ages There was an unusual commotion in different parts of the country The writ of the Moghal Emperor at Delhi did not run beyond the silent stone walls of the Red Fort

For the Urdu language, however it was an epoch making era in its march to the pinnacle of glory and grandeur Some of the best Urdu poets and writers wielded their pen in the decades immediately preceding as well as following the Mutiny of 1857 During these years this hotch potch of a spoken language of the Moghal army camps blossomed out into a highly stylish literary medium

Writers are considered as links between the past and the present and in Urdu veterans like Zauq Momin and Ghalib of Delhi and Nasikh, Atish, Anis and Dabir of Luck now truly made up the confluence which rang out the expressions that were coarse and cumbersome and rang in a style that was henceforth to fire the imagination of most men of

letters Even the last Moghal King Bahadur Shah Zafar though weighed down by age and cares of the State, could not remain uninfluenced by the new trend in Urdu versification He was a poet of no mean merit but who could have expected an emperor to say melancholy couplets like these

Na kisi ki aankh ka noor hun na kisi ke dil ka qarar hun
Jo kisi ke kaam na aasake men woh ek mushte ghubar hun

(I am neither the glow of anybody s eyes nor the calm of anybody s heart I am that handful of dust which is of no use to anyone)

Na to men kisi ka habib hun na to men kisi ka raqib hun
Jo bigar gaya woh nasib hun jo ujar gaya woh dyar hun

(Nobody calls me a friend nor am I a rival to anyone I am the one who is ill fated and whose abode has been wrecked)

Keh do in hasraton se kahin aur ja basen
Itni jagah kahan hai dil i daghdar men

(Tell these desires to go and dwell somewhere else Where is the space in my bruised heart to accommodate them ?)

Unmindful of the empire that had practically slipped out of his hands Bahadur Shah applied his mind almost exclusively to the enrichment of Urdu But he paid the price of his own and of his predecessors neglect of matters of State and spent the last years of his life in exile in Burma In one of his couplets he says

Hai kitna badnasib Zafar ke dafan ke liye
Do gaz zamin bhi mil na saki koo i yaar men

(How unlucky is Zafar not to get even two yards of land for his burial in the beloved s lane !)

On his account or for being associated with the poetic ousts in his court some luminaries of the Urdu language also suffered heavily in the avalanche that swept the city of Delhi in 1857 Among these was Ghalib whom adversity would not let pass a single day in peace Though his relations with some of the English officers were quite cordial his association with

Bahadur Shah's court made him a suspect in the British eyes The argument ran that since he had been on friendly terms with the Moghal King who became the symbol of unity for the heterogenous rebel factions he must be regarded as one of his partisans

A few years before the Mutiny, Ghalib s financial condition had become extremely difficult His repeated petitions for raising his pension had been rejected Creditors knocked at his door day and night Some of them filed suits against him for the realisation of their dues These included a well known English wine merchant, Mr MacPherson, from whom the poet bought liquor on credit How long could Ghalib manage with a pension of only Rs 62 50 a month ? There was no other source of income No more help was coming from his maternal grandfather s family On the other hand he was in the habit of spending money freely without giving thought to the consequences

Though Ghalib was one of the distinguished visitors to Bahadur Shah s court and was held in high esteem both by the King and his courtiers, he had not so far asked for help or patronage from this quarter His rival poet Zauq corrected Bahadur Shah s poems and therefore there was no question of Ghalib being engaged for this work and anything less than that he would not accept However on the recommendation of the court physician, Hakim Ahsanullah Khan and the King s spiritual mentor, Pir Kale Khan who was also a friend and well wisher of Ghalib, Bahadur Shah agreed to entrust the poet with the task of writing in Persian the history of the Timur dynasty on a monthly salary of Rs 50 He also bestowed on Ghalib the title of "Najam ul Daula Dabir ul Mulk Nazam i Jang besides honouring him with six dresses and three pieces of jewellery

The court salaries were paid half yearly Ghalib was hard pressed for money One third of the amount he received for the first six months was accounted by interest he had to pay on his loans On an appeal, accordingly, the court

directed that his salary be paid every month

As was the practice in the Orient, a poet would write a *qasida* (ode) or a *qat a* (stanza) in praise of his patron if he wished a favour The request was indirectly conveyed in the course of the verses To get his salary paid on a monthly basis Ghalib too wrote a *qat a* in which he said

Baske leta hun har maheene qaraz
Aur rehti hai sood ki taqrar
Meri tankhuah men tehaee ka
Ho gaya hai shreek sahukar
Aap ka banda aur phirun nanga
Aap ka naukar aur khaun udhar

(I borrow money every month and there is a regular demand on me for interest A third of my salary goes to the share of the money lender Is it not a shame that your servant should go about naked and live on credit?)

In 1854 the heir apparent to the throne, Mirza Mohamed Sultan Ghulam Fakhrudin Ranz alias Mirza Fakhroo, also became Ghalib s pupil and the poet began to receive an additional Rs 400 a year The same year Zauq died and the King began to send his poems for correction to Ghalib Bahadur Shah s youngest son Mirza Khizr Sultan too took up Ghalib s tutelage Besides the ruler of Oudh Nawab Wajid Ali Shah began sending him Rs 500 a year But all this was too good to last very long Oudh was merged in the British ruled territory in February 1856 and Wajid Ali was taken to Calcutta for detention there In July the same year Mirza Fakhroo died of cholera The final blow fell in May 1857 with the breaking out of the Mutiny

Indian sepoys from Meerut stormed Delhi and went on the rampage They not only looted and massacred the English residents of the city but also harassed the noble and rich among the Indians and pillaged their houses As soon as the trouble started Ghalib shut himself in his house in Mohalla Ballimaran in Chandni Chowk Luckily in this locality also

lived Hakim Mahmud Khan who was the Maharaja of Patiala s personal physician The Maharaja posted his troops outside the mohalla so that the mutineers could be prevented from entering it and molesting the residents The people were so scared that they would not stir out even to fetch water Fortunately for them, one day it rained very heavily and they could store water to last them for many days However, it was a period of great stress and privation for Ghalib as for most other people in the city

Without consulting him, Ghalib s wife sent her entire ornaments and costly clothes for safe custody in Kale Khan s house thinking that, the Pir being a respected religious leader, the mutineers would not touch at least him and his residence But it turned out to be a false hope Kale Khan s house was plundered by the rioters and Ghalib lost whatever valuables he possessed

The second phase of Delhi s nightmare began after the British recaptured the city and the palace in September 1857 The alien soldiers who had been thirsting all these days for revenge of the atrocities committed on English men women and children by the mutineers sacked the city in a manner that perhaps surpassed the butchery committed by Nadir Shah in 1739 A report on the massacre in the *Bombay Telegraph* from its correspondent said "All the city people within the walls when our troops entered were bayoneted on the spot and the number was considerable as you may suppose when I tell you that in some houses forty or fifty persons were hiding'

A fierce British cavalry officer, Lieutenant Hodson arrested Bahadur Shah who had hid himself in Humayun s tomb, about six miles away from the Red Fort The King was tried on charges of instigating and inspiring the mutineers and was deported to Rangoon where he spent the last years of his life until he died on 7th November, 1862, at the age of 87 His two sons and a grandson were shot down by Hodson without even the formality of a trial Thus came to an end the Moghal

imperial dynasty that had ruled India for well over three centuries

Describing the fall of Delhi, the renowned historian Dr R C Majumdar writes in his book *Sepoy Mutiny* "Bahadur Shah surrendered to Hodson on the sole condition that his life should be spared Thereupon he along with his favourite Begum Zinnat Mahal and her son, was taken to the Palace within the Red Fort, on 21st September Next day Hodson again rode to Humayun's tomb and arrested two sons of the King and one of his grandsons Sending them in a bullock-cart to the city, Hodson remained behind to deal with the crowd of about 6 000 men who had gathered round the princes He sternly ordered them to surrender their arms, and they obeyed Hodson then rode towards the city and found that the cart carrying the princes was surrounded by a huge crowd According to his own version, the crowd menaced the escort and he felt that unless he killed the princes the mob would rescue them So he ordered the three princes to strip off their upper garments and seizing a carbine from one of his men shot them all dead

The British believed that in the main it was the Muslims who were to blame for organising the native revolt This belief is shared by most chroniclers of the events of the Mutiny Dr Majumdar says 'Those who look upon the outbreak of 1857 as a national revolt advance as a strong argument in support of their view that it was a joint endeavour of the two great communities i.e. Hindus and Musalmans But though the sepoys and the common people of both the communities fought together against the English we miss that real communal amity which characterises a national effort It is a significant fact that the contemporary Englishmen generally viewed upon the outbreak mainly as a handiwork of the Muslims

Dr Majumdar cites the opinions of some English officers who took part in the suppression of the rebellion Sir Charles Raikes wrote "They (the Muslims) have behaved in the part

of India (North Western Provinces) where I had jurisdiction, very ill, so ill indeed that if the rest of the population had sympathised with them instead of antagonised, I should despair of governing India for the future '

A young lieutenant Frederick Roberts, afterwards Field Marshal Earl Roberts, the hero of the Afghan war, wrote to his father back home "I will show these rascally Musalmans that, with God s help, Englishmen will still be masters of India

Mrs Coopland a clergyman's widow, wrote "As this is completely a Mohammadan rising, there is not much to be feared from the Hindus of Banaras

A military officer, who took part in the siege of Delhi wrote "The Mohammadans were generally hostile to us, the Hindus much less This feeling persisted in the official British circles long after the fall of Delhi Referring to the city's recapture the same writer observed "It was not till the end of November that the Hindu portion of the population was allowed to return No Mohammadans could get in at the gate without a special order, and a mark was set upon their houses and they were required to prove their loyalty before getting back again

In view of the strong anti Muslim feeling among the English it is not surprising that Muslims became the special target of attack of the victorious troops and administrators Even persons who had remained neutral during the fighting or who had little to do with the ruling elite of the Red Fort were not spared

Ghalib continued to confine himself to his residence for fear of being manhandled by English brasshats It was a very trying period for him All his sources of income had dried up There was no question of his getting the pension from the Government resumed until the situation had cleared up and normalcy returned In this hour of distress Ghalib's Hindu friends stood by him They visited him regularly and attended to his needs His pupil, Munshi Har Gopal Tafta

sent him money from Meerut Lala Mahesh Dass supplied him liquor Others who took good care of him included his disciple, Munshi Hira Singh Dard, Pandit Shivji Ram and his son Balmukand All this Ghalib has thankfully acknowledged in his book *Dastanbo* (in Persian) which he wrote during this period and in which he has described the conditions then prevailing in the city He says 'I mention these gentlemen (Mahesh Dass Hira Singh Shivji Ram and Balmukand) because besides being dutybound to acknowledge their help, I want my other friends to know how Ghalib who has a very large circle of acquaintances and has a wellwisher in every house and every lane passed his time during these days If these four persons had not been living in the city there would have been no witness to his misery and helplessness '

In a letter written in 1860 to Nawab Sa adullah Khan, Ghalib describes the sack of Delhi as follows

Five lashkars (armies) invaded Delhi They came one after the other First was the army of the mutineers they looted the confidence of the citizens The second was the army of the khakis (British troops in khaki) In this invasion life and property, prestige and respect houses and their inmates—all signs of life were looted or destroyed The third invasion was that of famine in which thousands died of hunger Next came cholera which took away the lives of those who did not have anything to eat Finally came the invasion by malaria in which the loss of life might not have been very high but whoever got an attack lost all energy and his limbs became lifeless Delhi is still in its grip

A British chronicler of the Mutiny, T R Holmes describing the state of affairs after the fall of Delhi writes "The British soldiers showed no mercy to the men Harmless citizens were shot, clasping their hands for mercy Trembling old men were cut down The people of Delhi expiated many times over, the crimes of the mutineers Tens of thousands of men and women and children were wandering for no crime homeless over the country What they had left behind

was lost to them for ever for the soldiers, going from house to house and from street to street, ferreted out every article of value, and smashed to pieces whatever they could not carry away A military Governor had been appointed but he could do little to restrain the passions of those who surrounded him Natives were brought forward in batches to be tried by a military commissioner or by special commissioners each one of whom had been invested by the Supreme Government with full powers of life and death These judges were in no mood to show mercy Almost all who were condemned were sentenced to death A four square gallows was erected in a conspicuous place in the city, and five or six culprits were hanged every day English officers used to sit by, puffing at their cigars and look on at the convulsive struggles of the victims

An event that caused much distress and anxiety to Ghalib in the aftermath of the Mutiny was the death of his brother Yousaf The latter, who was mentally deranged lived in a lane called Saras near Farashkhana An old maid servant looked after him and an aged watchman guarded his house Ghalib wanted Yousaf to stay with him but the latter would not agree The distance between their houses was about a thousand yards

After the sepoy revolt had been suppressed the Muslims continued to be hounded out of their homes Ghalib became worried on Yousaf s account He could not visit him for fear of being mauled by the Firanghees who in the flush of victory had almost run amuck and suspected every native to be a sympathiser of the mutineers One day Yousaf s watchman brought to Ghalib the news that the soldiers had ransacked his house Soon after he reported that following an attack of high fever Yousaf had died in the middle of the night One chronicler of the events of the Mutiny, however, writes that Yousaf was shot dead when he came out of his house on hearing the sound of gunfire

The problem that now faced Ghalib was how to bury

Yousaf s body Even a shroud would not be procured as the bazars were closed There was no burial ground nearby Ghalib s neighbours volunteered to help him Some of them took a couple of bedsheets from the poet and guarded by a soldier of the Patiala army went to Yousaf's house They performed the most essential rites and buried the body in the courtyard of a nearby mosque

The discontinuance of pension and the loss of all ornaments and other precious things during the Mutiny had left Ghalib absolutely destitute Whatever articles remained in the house—his clothes, bedding utensils etc —were sold out one by one to meet his expenses He could not even carry on the writing of his book *Dastanbo* and ended it abruptly by saying

How long can I go on rubbing my reed (pen) in the writing of this children s play, that is *Dastanbo* ? The situation which I am facing will clearly result either in my death or my turning into a beggar In the event of my death, this story will remain incomplete In the second alternative, what else can be there except that I am shooed off from a shop or get a dime at some doorstep ? Hence there remains nothing to be written save my own disgrace and shame Even if the old pension is restored it will not solve my problems and if it is not restored then that will be my end The difficulty is that in both events I shall have to leave this city and pass the rest of my life in some other place because the climate of this place no longer appears to suit the heartbroken

As his difficulties grew Ghalib became more and more restive with his wife and other relatives He blamed them for his predicament Had he been free from domestic responsibilities, he thought, he could have gone away anywhere It was suggested that he should send his wife and adopted sons to live under the care of the Nawab of Loharu and himself go to Patiala where he should seek the patronage of the Maharaja through the good offices of Hakim Mahmud Khan He even sent a *qasida* in praise of the Maharaja but on reconsideration changed his mind

This sudden abandonment of his plan for a visit to Patiala had something to do with his recently developed relationship with Rampur's ruling family. A few months before the outbreak of the Mutiny, Ghalib had sent to Nawab Yousaf Ali Khan of Rampur a panegyric. In his school days the Nawab had learnt Persian from Ghalib. After he ascended the *musnad* (throne) in 1855 he tried his hand at writing poetry as it was considered a sine qua non for the Indian Muslim rulers of those days. In early 1857, he sent to Ghalib a few verses for retouching and advice and enclosed in the letter a sum of Rs 250. He did not fix a regular salary for the poet but occasionally sent him varied amounts. These came very handy to Ghalib whose resources could never keep pace with his requirements. However the Mutiny had disrupted this new source of his income as well. Now that things were settling down Ghalib thought that it would be far better to get paid for correcting the Rampur ruler's verses than to depend on the Patiala Maharaja's charity. Accordingly, he wrote to the Nawab to sanction for him a monthly stipend. The latter readily agreed to the request and Ghalib began to receive from him Rs 100 every month.

The restoration of his pension from the British treasury took a much longer time and a far greater effort. Although he had not taken sides in the Mutiny or shown any sympathy to the mutineers or even antipathy towards the English, all the same he came under a cloud of misapprehensions, not a few. To clear himself of all suspicions, Ghalib sent copies of his new book *Dastanbo* to several officers. The idea was that a perusal of the book would convince them that he was quite innocent and had nothing to do with the Mutiny. He also wrote several letters seeking interviews with officers but all his efforts to re-establish rapport with them proved unsuccessful.

Ghalib was not the only member of the educated elite who remained aloof from the violent happenings. The intellectuals as a class showed no interest in the progress of

the Mutiny On the contrary, they wished and prayed for the return of the British administration so that they could pursue their literary pastimes in an atmosphere of peace Analysing the causes of the failure of the sepoy movement, Dr Majumdar says The lack of interest shown by the intellectuals was a serious drawback the full extent of which will perhaps never be known History of modern times shows that all great political movements have an intellectual background and draw their nourishment largely from that source The outbreak of 1857 not only lacked any such intellectual background but ran counter to the views of the intellectual classes who never looked upon it with sympathy Therefore it would be unjust to say that Ghalib stayed away from the movement out of cowardice

An enemy of Ghalib attributed to him the writing of two verses hailing the proclamation of Bahadur Shah as the Emperor of India Ghalib vehemently denied this charge In fact he was ignorant of the real authorship of these verses When he went to pay his courtesies to the Commissioner, the latter asked him about the matter Ghalib replied "He (the accuser) is wrong The King himself was a poet His sons were poets His servants were poets God knows who composed these couplets The newspaper scribe has attributed them to me Had these lines been from me that paper in the office would have been in my handwriting

Later on somebody told Ghalib that the couplets had actually been composed by Zauq at the time of Bahadur Shah s coronation on 30th September, 1837, and that they had been published in the Urdu newspapers of that day Ghalib tried to ferret out the old issues of the newspapers but could not spot them To cut short, however he was completely successful in dispelling the suspicions that had been aroused against him of being hostile to the British Government

For quite some time after the Mutiny, Ghalib s mainstay for meeting his expenses was the stipend of Rs 100 per month he received from the Nawab of Rampur For the few months

he stayed in that State, in 1860 the amount was doubled The Nawab also made him additional ad hoc payments from time to time On April 31, 1865, Nawab Yousaf Ali Khan expired and his eldest son Nawab Kalab Ali Khan, ascended the *musnad* Ghalib undertook another trip to the State to pay homage to the old ruler and respects to the new He was received warmly by Nawab Kalab Ali and given a special bungalow for his stay

On his return journey from Rampur the poet met with an unfortunate accident Due to heavy rains, the Ramganga was in spate It had to be crossed over a temporary boat bridge Ghalib s palanquin had just crossed it when the bridge collapsed and was washed away by the current all his servants and the luggage being left on the opposite bank With great difficulty the poet reached Moradabad and passed the night in an inn with just one blanket to protect him against the bitter December cold It rained the whole night He could not stand the strain and fell ill Next morning he was taken to the house of a local maulvi who provided him comfort and arranged for his treatment When the Nawab learnt of the mishap he sent a special messenger to Ghalib asking him to return to Rampur the moment he was fit to travel But before the messenger could arrive, the poet had left for Delhi

Ghalib had gone to Rampur with great expectations He was under heavy debts and thought that the Nawab alone could solve his financial difficulties But the latter gave him no more than Rs 1,200 which was too little to meet the crisis Back home, unwarily he wrote a sarcastic letter to the Nawab and this led to a rupture of their relations Later on second thoughts, he tried to clear the misunderstandings but the Nawab could not be won over again

Ghalib s debts and difficulties continued as ever, even increased His humour too that had stood him in good stead all along—at least at home with an uninspiring wife—seemed now on the point of deserting him What suffered most dur-

ing these last four years of his life (he died on February 15, 1869) was his Muse and the tragedy is that he never realised it His false sense of pride failed to revive and inspire it The Mutiny in which his aloofness from politics let him play no part thus had had its vengeance on him finally but slowly, steadily depriving him of his talent for creation as well as existence

But for his Urdu ghazals written over the years, history would have recorded Ghalib as one more casualty of the 1857 holocaust

4

GHALIB'S GHAZALS

Hain aur bhi duniya men sukhanwar bahut achhe
Kehte hain ke Ghalib ka hai andaz-i-biyan aur

(In the world are poets good galore
But different they say is Ghalib's style)

THE ghazal has not only taken pride of place in Urdu poetry but has also overshadowed all forms of versification in other Indian languages At the *mushairas*, it is the ghazal that draws the longest and loudest applause and leaves the listener in a state of transcendental bliss Even the Westerners have paid it a compliment by trying to imitate this style of poetry

What is a ghazal? Briefly stated it is the medium of expression of a man's love for his beloved The word ghazal, in Arabic, means talking to women or talking love The ghazal as originally composed, was a song consisting of the stray thoughts of a lover complaining of separation, longing for union and giving expression to sensations of pain and pleasure that characterise the experiences of love

A ghazal starts with a verse called the *matla* which contains two lines the last but one word of which in the first line known as *qafia* rhymes with the last but one

word in the second line It closes with a verse called *maqta* in which the poet introduces his name or nom de plume All the verses from the *matla* to the *maqta* are written in the same metre, and endings of the second line of each verse known as *radif* must rhyme together

The traditional ghazal contains between six and eleven couplets but nowadays some poets write ghazals containing up to twenty five verses Each verse gives full meaning to a thought and can stand by itself

There are usually three actors who make up the cast of a conventional ghazal the lover (*aashiq*) the beloved (*mashooq*) and the lover s rival (*raqeeb*) The lover with whom the ghazal writer identifies himself, is the one who has been sinned against most He is shown as luckless restless grief stricken given to drinking unjustifiably defamed un mindful of the cruelties of the beloved and a victim of the intrigues of his rivals Though he is sick and weak he is faithful and ever ready to barter away his life for a smile of the beloved

On the other hand the beloved though a paragon of beauty is boastful unfaithful callous of heart careless of manner and bitter of tongue She is like an idol who is in different towards her worshippers and their sufferings being also likened to a hangman (*qatil*) and a non believer (*kafir*)

The rival (*raqeeb*) supposedly gets preferential treatment at the hands of the beloved He is always plotting to pre vent a conciliation be ween the *aashiq* and the *mashooq* The former treats him with contempt while the latter shows him consideration for the most part to spite the lover

Shah Wali ullah a renowned poet who wielded his pen during the reign of King Mohamed Shah in the early decades of the eighteenth century was the first man to write an Urdu ghazal He was a native of Aurangabad but shifted to Delhi in 1722 Urdu in those days was a curious mixture of Hindi and Persian words and had yet to develop

a syntax and grammar of its own Most Muslim poets wrote verses in Persian The credit for making Urdu the language of the nobility and giving it the same status as was enjoyed by Persian goes to Wali He occupies the same place in Urdu as Amir Khusro does in Hindi and Chaucer in English Wali s verses have a peculiar charm and flow, for example

Dekhna har suboh tujh rukhsar ka
Hai mutala matla i anwar ka
Yad karna har ghari tujh yar ka
Hai wa ifa mujh dil i beemar ka

(To see your rosy cheeks in the morning is like having a good look at the rising sun To think of you every minute has become a duty of mine—a lovesick heart)

The next great writer of Urdu ghazals, Mir Mohamed Taqi Mir was born at Agra in 1700 and lived a life of full one hundred years He too shifted to Delhi and became so popular that travellers from Delhi used to recite his ghazals before gatherings of men in the cities they visited When Nawab Asaf ud Daula of Oudh heard of Mir's fame he sent for the poet and granted him a handsome pension Mir s verses are liked for their spontaneity facile expression and touching imagery Mark the following lines

Patta patta boota boota haal hamara jane hai
Jane na jane gul hi na jane bagh to sara jane hai
Aashiq sa sada to koee na hoga duniya men
Ji ke zian ko ishq men uske apna wara jane hai

(Every leaf and every plant knows my condition The whole garden is familiar with it If there is one who does not know it it is the rose In the whole world you cannot find a person as trustful as a lover who regards even his death for his beloved as his own gain)

A wellknown contemporary of Mir was Mirza Rafi Sauda who was born at Delhi in 1713 He was the son of an Afghan trader and that perhaps explains why he chose the

word "Sauda' (transaction) for his nom de plume He became so popular in a few days that his ghazals began to be recited in every street and corner of Delhi The Moghal King, Shah Alam, got his own compositions revised by Sauda

Sauda s ghazals are marked by elegance and bold expression He was always on the look out for new words, but avoided the pedantic style employed by court poets like Mushafi, Insha and Jurrat, whose attachment to the kings and nawabs reduced their poetry to sycophancy and pleasure songs for their patrons In the use of poetic symbols, there is none to beat Sauda For example

Barabari ka teri gul ne jab khayal kiya
Saba ne mar thapera munh uska lal kiya

(When the rose made a claim of equality with you—the beloved—the morning breeze slapped it so hard that its cheeks turned red)

After Mir and Sauda further improvements in the ghazal were carried out by Khwaja Mir Dard, Mohamed Mir Soz Nasikh and Atish, but it was left to Momin Zauq and the greatest of them all Ghalib to introduce new subjects new motifs and new symbols and to chisel the language of this poetic medium During this period, we find Urdu at its best abounding in king s idioms and civilised expressions All these three poets were born in the last decade of the eighteenth century and wielded their pen through the greater part of the nineteenth century The names of the lanes (*kuchas*) of Chandni Chowk, in Delhi, where they lived have been immortalised through association with them When Zauq received an invitation from the King of Deccan he declined it by saying

Aajkal garche Deccan men hai bari qadr i sukhan
Kaun jae Zauq par Dilli ki galian chhor kar

(These days there is high appreciation of poetry in Deccan but O Zauq who has the heart to leave the bylanes of Delhi?)

Though Ghalib s output of ghazals in Urdu is much smaller than that in Persian it is his Urdu Diwan containing a little over 200 pieces (about 1500 couplets) that has rocketed him into immortal fame And no other style of verse except the ghazal could have caught aesthetically better the deep emotional tension of his mind and the flights of his imagina tion of which Iqbal said

Fikr i insan par teri hasti se ye roshen hua
Hai par i murgh i takheyyul ki rasaee ta kuja

(Your existence has made man realise what heights the wings of imagination can reach)

But to Ghalib even the ghazal did not appear adequate for a full employment of his high soaring genius He observes

Baqadr i shauq nahin sahne tangna i ghazal
Kuchh aur chahiye wusaat mire biyan ke liye

(The expanse of ghazal is not large enough to fulfil my desires I need something with bigger dimensions to express my thoughts)

Ghalib transformed the entire spirit of ghazal writing He broadened its sphere from a mere love prattle to encompass the whole gamut of man s life and experiences He began composing verses before he had completed eleven years of his age When he showed his first poem in Persian to his teacher, Sheikh Muazzam, the latter commented that it had a meaning less *radif* This silenced the boy Shortly afterwards how ever, Ghalib spotted a verse having the same *radif* in the wellknown poet, Mulla Zahuri s collection of ghazals He showed the book to the teacher who was taken aback on see ing the particular couplet He then told the young pupil "You have God given aptitude for the Persian language You must practise verse writing and never mind any criticism

When Mir Taqi saw the young poet's compositions he commented "If this boy gets a competent teacher who sets him on the right road he will become a peerless poet Other

wise, he will rattle off meaningless stuff How prophetic was Mir! He was proved right on both counts Ghalib did start on a wrong note but since he was gentle and understanding by nature he thoughtfully listened to the advice of his teachers and well wishers and soon came on to the right path He weeded out from his early compositions such verses as the critics regarded improper and not in good taste And having finally found his moorings, he never looked back

What distinguishes Ghalib s ghazals from those of many other poets is that in his case it is the words that follow the thoughts whereas the method generally employed by others is to think of a number of rhyming words for the *qafia* and then to think of suitable ideas for their use This accounts for the fact that most of Ghalib s ghazals consist of no more than ten or twelve lines Others who preceded as well as those who followed him wrote lengthy ghazals thinking that by reeling off a large number of verses in the same *radif* and *qafia* they could display their power of versification Most such verses are nothing but efforts at rhyming Their claim to literary merit is at best limited

The thought contained in Ghalib s verses is for the most part expressed in a strikingly original manner For instance in his love poems he avoided the line taken by most others, that is, giving expression to the pangs of love by using the metaphor of the beloved causing injury to the lover A common theme is to describe the kind of dagger used, the force with which it is thrust and the extent and depth of the wound inflicted Ghalib s way of alluding to the injuries caused by the indifference or heartlessness of the beloved is peculiarly his own For example

Nazr lage na kahin unke dast o bazoo ko
Ye log kion mere zakhm i jigar ko dekhte hain

(Why do the people stare at the injuries in my heart ? May the strong hand and arm of my beloved not catch the evil eye!)

Nothing else could have described better the intensity of

the pain suffered by a lover as a result of the beloved s callous ness By implying that the wounds are such as will show the strength of her arm, Ghalib leaves the whole description of the manner in which they have been caused to the imagination of the reader Besides he tells us of his concern for the slightest harm that may be done to the beloved by the evil eye of the beholder The subtlety of Ghalib s thought can be judged from another verse

Samajh ke karte hain ba ar men wo pursash i haal
Ke ye kehe ke sar i rahguzar hai kya kehiye

(The beloved enquires about my condition only in the bazar knowing full well that, being in the market place, I won t make a complaint against her indifference)

What the poet actually wants to say is that there is no sincerity in the beloved s inquiry about his health or wellbeing She is only feigning concern about it

When he wants to say that he would rather be killed at the hands of the beloved than die a slow death he alludes to the excuses made by the latter for not obliging him, like there not being a dagger at hand or the non avail ability of a shroud

Aaj wan tegh o kafan bandhe hue jata hun main
Uzr mere qatl karne men wo ab laenge kya

(Today I am going to my beloved armed with the sword and shroud What excuse will she now offer for refusing to behead me ?)

The same sentiment is found in another couplet

Sar urane ke jo waide ko mukarrar chaha
Hans ke bole tere sar ki qasm hai hamko

(When I requested her to repeat her promise to behead me she smiled and said 'I swear by your head)

The beloved s reply has a double meaning (i) that I swear I shall behead you and (ii) that your head is so dear to me that I swear by it

A few more specimens of Ghalib s couplets on the theme of love

Gada samajh ke wo chup tha meri jo shamat aaee
Utha aur uth ke qadam men ne pasban ke liye

(The beloved took me for a beggar and kept silent But as ill luck would have it I made the mistake of falling at the feet of the sentry)

The idea is that had he (the lover) not requested the sentry for help in letting him in he might have escaped the wrath of the beloved when he appeared at the latter s door by being mistaken for a beggar

Is sadagi pe kaun na mar jae ai Asad
Larte hain aur hath men talwar bhi nahin

(Who will not give his life for the beloved s naivety? She has no sword in her hand and yet she fights !)

Ishq mujh ko nahin wehshat hi sahi
Meri wehshat teri shohrat hi sahi
Ham bhi tasleem ki khu dalenge
Beniazi teri aadat hi sahi

(You say I am not in love with you and that it is only madness on my part But you can t deny that my madness is the cause of your fame Besides I shall develop the habit of bowing my head even though you are habitually indifferent towards me)

Jab tak dahn i akhm na paida kare koee
Mushkil tha tujh se rah i sukhan kare koee

(Until I took injury on my lips it was difficult to establish communion with you)

Chhora na rashk ne ke tere ghar ka nam lun
Harik se poochhta hun ke jaun kidhar ko main

(Envy has made me unfit to think of going to your house Hence I ask everybody where I should go)

Ham rashk ko apne bhi gavara nahin karte
Marte hain magar unki tamanna nehin karte

(I cannot tolerate even my own envy of her I am dying yet I would not wish for her—lest I should appear jealous)

Unke dekhe se jo aajati munh par raunaq
Wo samajhte hain ke beemar ka haal achha hai

(When I see the beloved my face displays rapture, but she takes it to be a sign of improvement in my sickness)

Dekhiye paate hain ushaaq buton se kya faiz
Ik Brahmin ne kaha hai ke ye saal achha hai

(Let us see what benefit the lovers get from their beloveds A Brahmin has predicted that this is a hopeful year)

Ek ek qatre ka mujhe dena para hisab
Khoon i jigr wadiyat i mizghan i yar tha

(I had to account for each drop of blood of my heart which I held in trust for the eyelashes of my beloved)

All the blood in the lover's heart is the property of the beloved which he is holding in trust He is returning it drop by drop through tears of blood

Ye kahan ki dosti hai ke bane hain dost naseh
Koee charasaz hota koee ghamgusar hota

(It is no friendship if a companion turns a counsellor he had better be a healer or a confidant)

Marne ki ai dil aur hi tadbir kar ke main
Shayaan i dast o bazoo i qatil nahin raha

(O my heart think of some other manner of death I am no longer fit to be beheaded by the beautiful hand of the assassin—the beloved)

Dil se mitna teri angusht hinayee ka khayal
Hogaya gosht se nakhun ka juda ho jana

(To erase from mind the thought of your hand s colour is like detaching the nail from the flesh)

Rone se aur ishq men bebaak ho gae
Dhoe gae ham aise ke bas paak ho gae

(Tears have made me fearless and desperate in love They have washed me so much that I can hide my love no more)

Badguman hota hai wo kafir na hota kashke
Is qadr zauq i nawai murgh i bustani mujhe

(My beloved gets diffident when I go to the garden I wish I did not love so intensely the voice of the nightingale)

The poet says that his beloved gets annoyed when she sees him go to the garden to hear the nightingale (who also like the lover sings sad songs) instead of going into the wilderness as any true lover would do

De mujh ko shikayat ki ija at ke sitamgar
Kuchh tujh ko ma-a bhi mere a-aar men aawe

(Give me O heartless a cause to complain so that you derive more pleasure from my discomfiture)

The lover asks the beloved who is a tyrant, to make it possible for him to complain (of her callousness) so that she becomes more wrathful and consequently inflicts harsher punishment on him This will according to the lover, bring more joy and satisfaction to the beloved And that is what he secretly desires

Maanga karenge ab se du a hijr i yar ki
Akhir to dushmani hai asr ko du a ke saath

(From now on I shall pray for separation from the beloved After all is not there enmity between the prayer and effect ?)

The lover s wish always has the opposite effect He would therefore henceforth pray only for a thing that he does not really want The same sentiment is found in the following verse

Khoob tha pahle se hote jo ham apne badkhuah
Ke bhala chahte hain aur bura hota hai

(I should have been an ill wisher from the very beginning as every time I wish something the opposite happens)

Dosti ka pardah hai beganagi
Munh chhupana ham se chhora chahiye

(Posing unfamiliarity with the lover will only betray the beloved Hence she should give up the habit of turning away her face)

Ghalib tells the beloved that the latter should not try to convince the people that there is nothing between them by pretending lack of acquaintance with him This only betrays their relationship She should therefore freely meet him

Dushmani ne meri khoya ghair ko
Kis qadr dushman hai dekha chahiye

(Her enmity has estranged other men too, See how hostile she is towards me !)

The beloved is so much cross with the lover that when other people talk of him, she gets angry with them too !

Bahut dinon men taghaful ne tere paida ki
Wo ik nigah jo bezahir nigah se kam hai

(Your prolonged indifference at least turned into a half look a look that cannot be called a full view)

After remaining unconcerned for a long time, the beloved shows slight interest in the lover This itself, though not adequate, brings great relief to him

Kare hai bada tere lab se kasb i rang i firogh
Khat i piala sarasar nigah i gulchin hai

(When you drink the wine acquires colour from your lips while the cup looks at you with the greedy eyes of the gardener)

Kion na ho chashmi butan mehw i tughafil kion na ho
Yaani is beemar ko nazarra se parhez hai

(Why should not the eyes of the idol be engrossed in inattention ? This patient is forbidden to see anything)

The beloved is compared to an idol of stone which

always appears to be too absorbed in thoughts to look at the admirer

Diya hai dil agar usko bashr hai kya kehiye
Hua raqeeb to ho namabar hai kya kehiye

(If the go between has given her his heart let him What can I say? He too is a human being If he has turned my rival let him After all he is my messenger)

The lover's messenger himself turned a lover the moment he saw the beloved and thus became his rival But the poet does not mind it because after all the messenger too is a human being Moreover since he has carried his messages to her, it is not fair to reproach him

Hai mujhe abr i bahari ka baras kar khulna
Rote rote gham i furqat men fana ho jana

(It is no more than a cloudburst for me to dissolve my self into tears of separation)

To annihilate himself by crying his heart out over separa tion from the beloved is a small matter for the lover—as small as the burst of a cloud in the rainy season

Mund gayin kholte hi kholte aankhen Ghalib
Yar lae meri balin pe use par kis waqat

(In vain I looked till the eyes finally shut They brought her to my bedstead only when I could see no more)

The lover kept his eyes open in the hope of seeing his beloved one day but when his friends were at last able to persuade her to visit him the light had gone out of his eyes

Sar phorna wo Ghalib i shorida haal ka
Yad aagaya mujhe teri deewar dekh kar

(The sight of your house reminds me of the days when I used to hit my head against walls like mad)

Raaz i mashooq na ruswa ho jae
Warna mar jane men kuchh bhed nahin

(Were it not for fear of disgracing the beloved I would

gladly die There is no secret in death as such)

De wo jis qadr zillat ham hansi men talenge
Baare aashna nikla unka pasban apna

(I shall laugh away whatever humiliation she may heap on me How nice that her watchman turned out to be an acquaintance of mine!)

Hamnashin mat keh ke barham kar na bazm i aish i dost
Wan to mere nala ko bhi aitbaar i naghma hai

(Do not say I am disrupting the happy assembly of the beloved with my wails because there even my lament is enjoyed like a song)

Raha bla men bhi main mubtalae afat i rashk
Blai jan hai ada teri ik jahan ke liye

(The fact that your blandishments are a source of distress to the whole world has kept me a prisoner of jealousy How I wish your coquetry was meant only for me!)

Kion jal gaya na taab i rukh i yar dekh kar
Jalta hun apni taaqat i deedar dekh kar

(Why didn t I burn with the radiance of the beloved s face ? Now I am burning with anger over my strong eyesight which has withstood her glare)

Uljl te ho tum agar dekhte ho aeena
Jo tum se shahr men hon ekdo to kionkar ho

(You get irritated with your reflexion in the mirror What would happen if there were one or two more like you in town the?)

The beloved becomes jealous even of her own reflexion when she looks into the mirror What would be the condition of her mind if there were a few more beautiful women like her in the town ? She would surely go mad with jealousy

Kionkar us but se rakhun jan a_iz
Kya nahin hai mujhe eeman a iz

(Why should I value life more than the beloved ? Don t

I hold dear my faith?)

To sacrifice life for the sake of the beloved is the real religion, according to the poet Therefore, if the lover has any regard for his faith he should not hesitate to die for her

Khat likhenge garche matlab kuchh na ho
Ham to aashiq hain tumhare nam ke

(I shall continue to write letters even if there is nothing to say because I am a lover of your name)

Ishq ne Ghalib nikamma kar diya
Warna ham bhi aadmi the kam ke

(Love has left Ghalib unfit for anything otherwise, he too was a useful man)

Wo aaen ghar men hamare Khuda ki qudrat hai
Kabhi ham unko kabhi apne ghar ko dekhte hain

(How wonderful that she should have graced my house with a visit! Sometimes I look at her and sometimes at the house!)

The lover is wonderstruck that the beloved should have come to a house like his!

Ghalib had varied experiences of life He was a genius without wordly luck But fortunately these things did not cow him down and he did not turn sarcastic like Swift or pessimist like Keats though a feeling of despondency is easily discernible in some of his verses

Ranj se khugar hua insan to mit jata hai ranj
Mushkalen itni parin mujh par ke aasan ho gaeen

(When man gets used to suffering the suffering disappears I faced so many troubles that it became easy for me to solve them)

It is our experience that when we are overwhelmed by difficulties we stop worrying about them any more This was the case with Ghalib as well There was no end to his troubles with the result that he became insensitive to them and therein lay their solution

Karte kis munh se ho ghurbat ki shikayat Ghalib
Tumko bemehri i yaraan i watan yad nahin

(How dare you complain O Ghalib against the strangers? Don t you remember the indifference of your own countrymen?)

Mujhko dyar i ghair men mara watan se door
Rakh li mere Khuda ne meri bekasi ki sharm

(Death came to me in a stranger s house far away from my country That way God took care of my helplessness and poverty)

Nobody wants to die in a foreign land but Ghalib thanks God for giving him such a death (he is only imagining it) be cause he has no shroud or a tomb and as such can avoid the uncharitable remarks of his countrymen It is an accusation against the poor return for his labours

Kehte hain jeete hain umeed pe log
Ham ko jeene ki bhi umeed nahin

(Men they say live on hope As for me, I hope not to live)

Munhasir marne pe ho jiski umeed
Na umeedi uski dekha chahiye

(It is worth knowing the extent of the dismay of one whose hope rests on his death)

Koee weerani si weerani hai
Dasht ko dekh ke ghar yad aya

(What desolation! I am reminded of home when I see the desert)

The poet thinks that his home is the most desolate place in the world He is reminded of its solitariness when he sees a desert

Darya i ma asi tanak aabi se hua khushk
Mera sar i daman bhi ahbi tar na hua tha

(The river of sins dried up for want of water while I had not dipped even the fringe of my skirt in it)

The poet has exhausted the list of all possible sins and yet

not even a fraction of his desires have been satisfied

Ham kahan ke dana the kis hunar men yakta the
Besabab hua Ghalib dushman aasman apna

(I was neither learned nor a master of any art Why then for nothing did the heaven turn against me?)

In aablon se paon ke ghabra gaya tha main
Ji khush hua hai rahko purkhar dekh kar

(My foot sores had scared me but the sight of the thorny path has put my mind at ease)

Zindgi men to wo mehfil se utha dete the
Dekhun ab mar gaye par kaun uthata hai mujhe

(They used to turn me out of the assembly when I was alive Now that I am about to die let me see who turns me out i e carries my corpse to the grave)

Aur ba ar se le aae agar toot gaya
Jam i Jam se ye mera jam i safal achha hai

(My cup of mud is better than the cup of Jamshed If it breaks I can buy a new one from the bazar)

The allusion is to Ghalib s rich rivals who enjoyed royal patronage and therefore could afford to keep expensive articles Another couplet on the same subject

Tum shahr men ho to hamen kya gham jab uthenge
Le aaenge ba-ar se jakar dil o jaan aur

(I am not worried if you are in the town i e well off When I want a heart and life I shall go to the market and get them)

Ghalib s verses are full of deep philosophic truths ex pressed with remarkable facility in the language of a mystic For example

Hai ghaib i ghaib jisko samajhte hain ham shahud
Hain khwab men hanuz jo jaage hain khwab men

(It is the absence of absence which we call manifestation Those who have awakened in a dream are still dreaming)

The eternal conflict to be or not to be was always

there in Ghalib's mind as is evident from this verse

Na tha kuchh to Khuda tha kuchh na hota to Khuda hota
Duboya mujh ko hone ne na hota main to kya hota

(When I was not born I was God and had I not been born I would have remained God My being here has been the cause of my ruin What would have happened if I were not born ?)

Ghalib, while trying to convey succinctly the direct awareness of the mystic that there is no being but God and that God is all, laments that his coming into the world has been the cause of his undoing He is inspired by an unexpressed faith in God Almighty and he alludes to Him again and again

Milna tera agar nahin aasan to sehl hai
Dushwar to yahi hai ke dushwar bhi nahin

(Were it impossible to reach you it would have simplified matters But the fact is that to find you is also not very difficult)

The poet would have been content to leave the matter alone if he were convinced that God was beyond his reach Then there would have been no problem before him He would as well have given up all effort But the trouble is that it is not so difficult to find Him Hence he cannot give up the search and must continue to suffer

Ishrat i qatra hai darya men fana ho jana
Dard ka had se guzrna hai dawa ho jana

(The drop becomes happy when it merges in the Ocean When pain passes the stage of toleration it turns into a cure)

Just as a drop of water loses its significance or individuality by getting lost in the ocean so also man loses all sense of pain when he dies In other words, death brings him cure and emancipation

Qaid i hayat o band i gham asal men dono ek hain
Maut se pahle aadmi gham se najat paae kion

(Life imprisonment and the sentence of sorrow are the same thing Why should then man find deliverance before death ?)

Life and grief go hand in hand and therefore there is no point in seeking deliverance from the difficulties of living until death intervenes

Chalta hun thori door harik te ro ke saath
Pehchanta nahin hun abhi rahbar ko main

(I join everyone whom I see walking fast and accompany him up to some distance So far I have not recognised the right guide)

A man in search of God is too willing to accompany or follow anybody in whom he sees something unusual or who can perform some miracle This process continues in the hope that the seeker might one day find God but it turns out to be an illusion and the right person who can really guide him is seldom found

Raat din gardish men hain saat aasman
Ho rehega kuchh na kuchh ghabraen kya

(The seven skies are rotating day and night Something is bound to happen Why should I then worry ?)

Harchand subukdast hue butshakni men
Ham hain to abhi rah men hai sang i garan aur

(What use if I became proficient in breaking idols ? There will always be a heavy stone in my path so long as I live)

Life itself is a heavy weight on man and howsoever hard he may try to push it away, it will always be there as long as he is alive

Once the destination is reached Ghalib has no complaint He says

Safeena jabke kinare pe aalaga Ghalib
Khuda se kya sitam o jor i nakhuda kehiye

(Now that the ship has reached the shore what is the use of complaining against the tyranny of the boatman ?)

Although we find Ghalib has devoted much of his time and energy to writing verses on love and wine, he is not altogether lacking in valuable moral teachings The moralist in him finds expression in couplets like these

Ibn i Mariam hua kare koee
Mere dukh ki dawa kare koee

(How am I concerned with the son of Mary ? There should be someone who can heal *my* wounds)

Rok lo gar ghalat chale koee
Baksh do gar khata kare koee

(Check a man if he goes astray Forgive him if he makes a mistake)

Na suno gar bura kahe koee
Na kaho gar bura kare koee

Hear not if someone speaks ill of you Complain not if he acts wrongly)

Kon hai jo nahin hai hajatmand
Kis ki hajat rawa kare koee

(Who is there who is not needy ? How can anyone help him ?)

Kya kiya Khizr ne Sikander se
Ab kise rahnuma kare koee

(You know what Khizr did to Alexander Whom can we now trust as our guide ?)

Jab tawakko hi uth gayee Ghalib
Kion kisi ka gila kare koee

(When we have lost all hope why should we complain against anyone ?)

Baske mushkil hai har kam ka aasan hona
Aadmi ko bhi muyyasar nahin insan hona

(It is not easy for every task to be easy Even a man cannot easily be a man)

In Urdu *aadmi* and *insan* both stand for man The first one is taken from the Persian language and the other from the Arabic Idiomatically, however *insan* has come to mean all that is good, human and manly in man The poet therefore means that it is not easy for a man to be manly

Ghalib mainly prided himself on his unique and inimitable style Its simplicity and grace rattled his more affluent rivals and, as if to tease them he said

Yarab na wo samjhe hain na samjhenge mere baat
De aur dil unko jo na de mujhko zaban aur

(O God they have neither understood me nor will they understand Give them another heart to follow my poetry rather than giving me another tongue to explain it to them)

The allusion is to critics who dubbed Ghalib s verses as meaningless or beyond comprehension

Bik jate hain ham aap mata i sukhan ke saath
Lekin ayyar i taba i kharidar dekh kar

(I sell myself also along with my compositions but only after scrutinizing the crafty nature of the buyer)

Dekhna taqrir ki la zat ke jo us ne kaha
Main ne ye jana ke goya ye bhi mere dil men hai

(See the charm of his talk We feel as if what he said was also in our heart)

This is quite a common experience Whenever we are impressed by someone s speech, we feel as if he has said just the thing that we wanted to say

The way Ghalib recited his verses, particularly at mushairas had a remarkable effect on the listeners Hali writes "Before the Mutiny when the mushairas were held in the Hall of Audience at the Red Fort, I heard him recite a ghazal in the early hours of the morning As he got his turn last of all, he remarked, Gentlemen, let me also now sing my *bhairavi*

Then he recited one Urdu and one Persian ghazal in such a melancholy voice as would make it appear that he was complaining against lack of appreciation of his verses by the audience'

Though Ghalib wrote a large number of *qasidas* and eulogies (mostly in Persian) the rewards he received were too small compared to the effort involved However, he had to resort to writing verses in praise of the King or some other nobleman whenever he needed money But he scrupulously shunned satirising anybody to which many other poets resorted either out of malice or as blackmail tactics Ghalib did not write a single *hijow* (derisive poem)

We do not find in Ghalib s compositions studies of nature and natural beauty and lengthy and connected descriptive poems like those written by Wordsworth and Tennyson This is because the ideals of poetry followed in the East and the West until a few decades back were in some respects quite dissimilar Ghalib s lot was cast in entirely different surroundings and he did not get opportunities that were available to the Western poets Had he been born in the West he would have perhaps done equally well in writing poetry of nature A few Urdu poets like Iqbal, who came on the scene after Ghalib and who had the benefit of an intimate touch with the West wrote some excellent pieces on the objects of nature

Evermore poets will compose verses on evermore subjects subjects that seemed unworthy of treatment to the greats of the nineteenth century But the ghazal and the way Ghalib handled it will continue to rule supreme in the realm of Urdu letters A maestro of the art in the fullest sense of the word, Ghalib lived for literature and died serving its cause up to the very last days of his life Just as there has been no second Kali Das in Sanskrit or a second Shakespeare in English though century after century has rolled by, similarly one cannot visualise a second Ghalib in Urdu in the centuries to come

5

AS PROSE WRITER

FEW LOVERS OF THE Urdu language other than the litterateurs, know that Mirza Ghalib was as great a master of prose as of poetry If his poetry is full of deep thought and meaning, his prose is a model of simplicity combined with elegance of style and purity of diction He writes as he would speak and there is a certain amount of flow and rhythm about his narrative which is spontaneous and highly satisfying to the mind However his fame as a poet has all but eclipsed his work as a prose writer This is because of the existence of a curious feature in the growth of almost all languages—the progress in poetry preceding advancement in prose But in the final analysis the real strength of a literature is by and large judged from the quality of its prose

To begin with, Urdu prose, like Urdu poetry, followed the pattern of Persian prose which for the most part was ornamental and superficial and lacked in sincerity and depth of feeling The narrative consisted more or less of rhymed sentences because the emphasis in those days was on versification which was the hallmark of an intellectual s status Moreover it was mostly the poet who sometimes wrote prose as well A majority of the educated persons carried on their correspondence in verse form The result was that *na m*

(poetry) left *nasr* (prose) far behind in the race for winning popular approbation

It was not until the establishment of the Fort William College in Calcutta by the East India Company in 1800 that a serious effort could be made at writing simple Urdu prose The English officers of the Company found it difficult to carry on the administration, especially at the lower level, in English which the Indians with a few exceptions did not follow The need arose for translating statute books and various other documents into a language that could be understood by the largest number of people of the subject race A special department was opened in the college for this purpose As many as fifty books were written and translated into Urdu in the first twenty years of the college s existence under the guidance of an Urdu knowing Englishman Dr John Gilchrist Indian authors and translators were given the honorific of "munshi They, in reality were the pioneers of Urdu prose that was genuinely free from the encumbrances of poetry Among those who made a name in the college were Lallu Lal Mir Aman Syed Haider Baksh and Nihal Chand Lahori Mir Aman s greatest service to Urdu prose was his translation of Amir Khusro s book *Chahar Dervesh* which became extremely popular among the people

The Christian missionaries working in India had the Bible translated into Urdu and other native languages in order to draw more and more adherents to their faith A Muslim scholar Shah Rafi ud Din for the first time translated the Quran into Urdu Some Sanskrit books, like *Shakuntla* , were also translated But curiously it was a European hailing from Holland, who compiled the first Urdu grammar and dictionary

Urdu prose received a further impetus with the opening of the Delhi College in 1827 and the formation of a literary society there in 1842 A number of books were written and translated into Urdu under the auspices of this society As a result of these efforts Urdu prose achieved respectability

and found an abiding niche in the people s hearts Its most glorious hour, however, came in 1832 when the Government of the day declared Urdu to be an official and court language of the country It is on record that Queen Victoria after she took over the administration of the country from the East India Company showed keen interest in learning Urdu Munshi Abdul Karim, a renowned teacher of Agra, was taken to England to teach her Urdu

Simultaneously with the work that was being done at Delhi and Calcutta, Urdu prose was taking rapid strides in Lucknow where it received valuable support and encouragement from the rulers of Oudh, especially Nawab Asaf ul Daula (1775 1797) Among the wellknown authors of this region were Faqir Mohammed Goya, (Publication *Bustan i Hikmat*) Rajab Ali Beg Saroor (Publication *Fasana i Ajaib*), and Rattan Nath Sarshar (Publication *Fasana i A ad*)

It was, however left to Mirza Ghalib to rid Urdu prose of much of its dispensable wordage, artificiality and embellishments He initiated a simple, natural and fascinating style of prose which became a model for other writers and laid the foundation of chaste modern Urdu Ghalib did not write books in prose on any particular subject but his Urdu letters (before 1850 he wrote in Persian only) to his friends, pupils and the ruling elite are samples of his offhand and effortless writing They shine with the lustre of his towering personality and unmatched wit The conversational touch which he introduced made them highly readable and aesthetically satisfying

In their letters, Ghalib and his correspondents frequently discussed each other s problems In a letter to Tafta, Ghalib tells us how greatly he enjoyed his correspondence He says '*Well sir would you continue to* be cross or would you make peace with me ? (probably a reference to something Tafta had mentioned) If you cannot get reconciled to me you should at least tell me the reason why you are angry In my solitude I live chiefly on letters from friends When I

receive a communication from a friend, I regard it as a visit from him There is not a day on which I do not receive several letters from various places In fact, on several days the postman brings letters more than once, a few in the morning and a few in the evening This keeps me busy as well as amused and I easily pass my day in perusing them and in having the pleasure of writing replies'

Ghalib used simple and matter of fact epithets for addressing his correspondents He discarded the use of verbiage and unnecessary appellations in vogue in Persian letter writing He would call the addressee in the most intimate and informal manner to make it appear as if the two are engaged in a friendly chat Mian, Maharaj brother, friend and dear were the expressions he mainly employed depending on the status of the person addressed After a word or two of greetings, he would straightaway broach the subject matter of his letter He disliked circumlocution Humour and frankness mark his style throughout He conveys his sentiments freely and fearlessly and calls for similar candidness in reply

Ghalib's best contemporaries tried to imitate his prose style and some of them did succeed in doing so to a considerable extent This he acknowledges in a letter he wrote to Mir Mehdi Majruh Ghalib observes "May you live long, Mir Mehdi Well done! A hundred thousand compliments What a nice style of Urdu writing you have evolved! I have begun to feel jealous Now listen All the wealth of Delhi in gold and pearls and jewellery has flowed into an area of Punjab as a result of the loot that followed the Mutiny But this style of writing was my peculiar property It has been looted by a cruel man who resides in Ansari Mohalla of Panipat However I bear him no grudge May God bless him The allusion is to the addressee himself and Mir Majruh could not but take it as a compliment

The ideal of prose writing set by Ghalib became the most popular and fashionable style of his period and has

remained so till today None of the great Urdu writers who followed Ghalib like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Maulana Mohammed Husain Azad and Maulvi Zaka Ullah, could remain uninfluenced by Ghalib s writings

Ghalib s letters have been collected in a book called Urdu i Mualla A few not included in it have been published under the title *Ud i Hindi* Besides Ghalib wrote some commentaries, a few prefaces and three treatises, namely *Tegh i Tez Nama i Ghalib* and *Lataif i Ghalib* There are also a few portions of a novel which could not be completed due to his death

Ghalib s letters have great historical value They give us information about the conditions in Delhi in the middle of the nineteenth century Some of them give a graphic account of the happenings during the Mutiny These letters also serve as the best introduction to his personality and if arranged in the chronological order they tell the story of his life more faithfully than even the best of biographies *could do*

In a letter dated 25th August, 1867, when he was nearing the end of his life, Ghalib s tells a friend (Saif ul Huq Sayyah) of his growing disabilities and apologises for being unable to write to his friends as he used to He says "I got both your letters but could not reply Before now I used to write while lying in bed Now I cannot do even that My hands tremble and my eyesight is weak *You must take me to be* one on the eve of his departure from this world "

Writing to another friend earlier in the same year, Ghalib traces the history of his forefathers The letter reads thus "You want to know something about me and the *Khilat* which I am entitled to As regards my nationality I am a Turk belonging to the Seljuk dynasty My grandfather came *to India in the time of Shah Alam* The *Moghal* empire was then on its decline He got into service as an officer with only 50 horsemen under him and with the distinction of *naqara* and *nishan* and a fertile *parganah* was given to him toward

the salaries of his men and himself The state of things was unsettled after the death of Shah Alam and the *parganah* was lost My father Abdullah Beg, then took service at Lucknow under Nawab Asaf ud Daula and from there went to Hydera bad to serve Nawab Nizam Ali Khan as leader of 300 horse men He was employed for several years but owing to some dispute he lost that job and came to Alwar He got into the employ of Raja Bakhtawar Singh and was killed in a battle I was then brought up by my uncle Nasrullah Beg, who was the Subedar of Akbarabad on behalf of the Mahrattas In 1806 the Subedar's jurisdiction was changed into that of a Commissioner appointed by the British Govern ment under General Lake General Lake asked my uncle to get some recruits for the British Government He got together a brigade of 400 cavalry men He was to get Rs 1 700 a year as his personal allowance and a jagir of more than a lakh of rupees per annum for life but he suddenly died and the brigade was disbanded and some pension in cash was allowed to his heirs in lieu of the jagir That pension I am getting now I was only five years of age when my father died and only eight years old when I lost my uncle I went to Calcutta in 1830 and got an inter view with the Governor General I was given a *khilat* of seven pieces of cloth, a plumed head dress and a pearl neck-lace Since then a *khilat* of the same kind was granted to me whenever there was a durbar at Delhi After the Mutiny my *khilat* and my entry into the durbar were stopped on the ground that I was one of the associates of the late King Bahadur Shah My application showing my innocence was then examined and the trouble ended after three years and the *khilat* was restored This was a remnant of the estate which I had lost and not a reward for any service rendered by me

A letter to Saif ul Huq Sayyah describes one of the sources of income on which Ghalib depended for a long time It says "For twelve years the late Nawab Yousaf Ali Khan of Rampur

used to send his verses to me along with a draft for Rs 100 every month He never asked me for a receipt for the money he gave He used to enclose the draft in his letter and occa sionally sent a lump sum of Rs 200 or Rs 250 as a gift During the disturbed period following the Mutiny my income from the Fort vanished and the pension from the British Government was stopped It was through the kindness of the Nawab of Rampur who continued sending my salary every month besides some other sums, that I and my depen dents managed to live in those days The present Nawab, may God preserve him long continues to send me my monthly salary as usual though I do not know whether occasional gifts will continue or not

An incident that distressed the poet most is described in one of his letters to Tafta Ghalib had written a *qasida* and sent it to Nawab Nasir ud Din Haider of Lucknow The Oudh ruler had granted him a reward of Rs 5 000 which never reached Ghalib as it had been misappropriated by some greedy courtiers through whom it was to be handed over to him In reply to Tafta s letter which probably alluded to that particular *qasida*, Ghalib said ' You have reminded me of a very old story that has revived a sore spot in my heart A *qasida* was submitted through Munshi Mohammed Husain to Roshan ud Daula and through the latter to Nawab Nasir ud Din Haider of Lucknow The Nawab ordered Rs 5 000 to be sent to me on the very day the *qasida* reached him The middleman Mohammed Husain, never informed me of this order The late Muzaffar ud Daula came to Delhi from Lucknow sometime after this and told me about it, but he asked me not to tell Mohammed Husain that he had given me the information I wrote to Sheikh Imam Baksh Nasikh to find out the fate of my *qasida* He wrote in reply that a reward of Rs 5 000 had been given by the ruler of Lucknow but Roshan ud Daula had himself kept Rs 3 000 out of the sum and given Rs 2 000 to Mohammed Husain asking him to send to Ghalib any amount he liked out of Rs 2,000

Nasikh enquired from me whether Mohammed Husain had sent anything to me I replied that I had not received even five rupees out of the total sum of Rs 5,000 On hearing this, Nasikh again wrote to me that I should send him a letter stating that I did not know whether any reward for my *qasida* had been given by the King He promised that he would manage to place this letter before the ruler and to get the person who had taken my money to disgorge it I wrote as desired but on the third day after the dispatch of my letter I heard that Nasir ud Din had died You can see for yourself what I could do and what could be done by Nasikh after this misfortune This was another instance of Ghalib chasing money and it eluding him in devious ways

It is rather strange that despite his fondness for books, Ghalib did not buy them for his own use or for building up a library of his own Perhaps he thought that this would interfere with his practice of helping his friends and pupils as the money at his disposal was always limited He appears to have possessed a retentive memory in his youth and to have absorbed and digested all that he read He had engaged a person to bring him books on hire from the bazar Those of his contemporaries who were friendly with him sent him copies of their publications as gifts or for comments Even these he would not retain and gladly offered to others

Ghalib was, however, an omnivorous reader He considered it an ideal bliss to have sufficient reading material (though mostly hired or borrowed) on his bookshelf and plenty of good wine in stock In a letter to Mir Majruh, he observes, speaking of himself in the third person 'Maulana Ghalib is very happy these days *Dastan I Amir Hamza* a book extending over 960 pages and a volume of *Bostan i Khayal*, of about the same size, have just arrived and he has got 17 bottles of pure wine in his storehouse He reads throughout the day and drinks throughout the night Any one who has attained this much deserves to rank with Jamshid or Alexander

He was a regular reader of newspapers that came out from Delhi Lucknow Agra and Calcutta There are references to several of them in his letters As he was an important visitor to the palace, it was necessary for him to know what the newspapers wrote about the comings and goings in the royal court and appointments and transfers of officials Calcutta was the headquarters of the British Government whereas Lucknow and Agra were among the main centres of literary activity The newspapers carried reports and comments on the literary events and controversies of the day Ghalib did not hesitate to take himself into the thick of a polemical discussion Hence it was entirely necessary for him to re main posted with all that was happening in the literary circles

Like an established artist, Ghalib was very punctilious about the correct printing of his works He wanted them to be as accurate as possible In one of his books the word *nahib* got printed by mistake instead of some other word He detected the error while the book was still in the press but only after a large number of forms had been turned out He at once wrote to Tafta, who was supervising the publication as follows The two leaves in which the word *nahib* occurs may be removed and corrected and other leaves substituted for them It does not matter whether such leaves number 400 or 500 Please get them all changed and I shall bear whatever expense is incurred on the paper so wasted If this word stands as it is it will disfigure the whole book and that will be a blot on my name It is an Arabic word I had corrected it in the manuscript but it seems to have escaped the attention of the lithographer I am dying of *nahib* (fear) of this word and would like to know soon if it has been corrected

He was equally keen on the excellence of his books get up Some of his letters show what great value he attached to neatly and beautifully got up books Once he received from Tafta a copy of the latter s book *Sunbalistan* It had

so shabby an appearance that Ghalib instead of thanking Tafta for the present wrote "You have wasted your money and also your composition and my corrections What a bad copy of your verses this is! You could have understood what relation your verses bear to this bad copy if you had been here these days and seen some of the unfortunate Begums from the old royal house going about in the streets whose faces are as beautiful as the moon but whose clothes are quite dirty and shabby and the shoes all torn I am not exaggerating things by using this simile but to be frank I regard *Sunbalistan* as a beautiful sweetheart in an ugly dress

The poet gives vent to similar feelings in a letter to Mir Majruh Good printing is done at Lucknow Whosoever gets his Diwan printed there is praised to the skies and the beauty of caligraphy adorns his words But curse be on Delhi, its weather and its printing The publishers here do not know how to mention the name of a writer properly I have been carefully examining every copy as it was sent to me The caligraphist used to send me the copy through another man and now that the Diwan has been published and a copy has been presented to me as its author, I find that the mistakes are all there and the copyist never took the trouble of correcting them Therefore I have had to add a list of corrections and shall have to purchase some copies for distribution whether I like them or not I shall send three copies to you and my other two friends there I am not pleased with the book nor will you be

Whenever Ghalib published a book, he himself bought a large number of copies from the publisher for free dis tribution among his friends When *Nama i Ghalib* came from the press, the poet wrote to a friend I got 300 copies of the book printed at my cost and distributed them far and wide I cannot send you a copy today because parcels are not taken by the post office on Sundays Tomorrow I shall send you all the copies that are left with me But Ghalib was upset if anybody offered him the price of the

book asked for. This aspect of his character is brought out in a letter he wrote to Mir Majruh: 'You tell me that there are many people wanting to purchase the book and that I should let you know the price. Well, I am not a broker, a bookseller or the manager of a press. The owner of the Ahmadi Press where the book has been published is Mohammed Husain Khan. Its manager is Mirza Ammun Khan. The press is in Shahadara and the owner lives in Kucha Rai Man of Delhi. The price is six annas. Postage is extra. You may give this information to the intending purchasers who may order any number of copies they may like by post. They may remit the price either in cash or send postage stamps to the above address. You and I have nothing to do with this matter.'

Ghalib's writings do not show any traces of contact with the West though a fairly large number of English words had infiltrated into the Urdu language before he died. He did occasionally make use of foreign words in his letters but that is about all. Otherwise, his thoughts, both in his poems and prose, were basically Eastern and clothed in a purely Oriental garb. He lived in an age when India's composite culture could successfully hold its own against the West's dominating influences. However Urdu writers like Hali, Syed Ahmed Khan and Nazir Ahmed, who soared into prominence after Ghalib were considerably influenced by the works and style of English authors.

6

PERSIAN WORKS

FOR A LONG TIME Mirza Ghalib devoted his literary energies to the writing of Persian verses He considered it like other leading poets of his day, something below his dignity to write in a language that was not yet thought ripe for literary expres sion of a high order His mind was so much imbued with the Persian mode of thought and expression that he scoffed at friends who suggested to him to write in Urdu Even when he did turn his attention to this language, his verses contained an overdose of Persian words and idioms and had only a sprinkling of Urdu words As such, they could hardly be called Urdu ghazals

Ghalib was so proud of his Persian Diwan that he declared that he must not be judged on the basis of the quality of his Urdu poems He said

Farsi bin ta babini naqsh hai rangarang
Bigu ar az majmua i Urdu ki be rang i manast

(Read my Persian verses if you want to see pictures of various hues Overlook my Urdu collection for it is devoid of my true colour)

The English poet Milton too had thought similarly when he said that his early writings in classical Latin would bring him greater fame than his English effusions But it was his

magnum opus *Paradise Lost* written in English that made him immortal Most other European writers of the pre-Renaissance era too preferred the medium of Latin to their own languages An outstanding exception was Dante who opted for his Italian dialect to write *The Divine Comedy*

There is no doubt that Ghalib s Persian ghazals are of a high standard and he could hold his own against many of the best writers of Persian including those of Iran itself He received his early education from an eminent Persian scholar Sheikh Muazzam who lived in Agra where Ghalib spent his boyhood But a real flair for Persian he got from his contact with a Parsi scholar of the Persian language Mulla Abdul Samad This acquaintance gave a big impetus to Ghalib s natural aptitude for Persian and made him a profound scholar of this language

Another factor that contributed to Ghalib's preference for Persian over Urdu was his stay in his father in law's (Mirza Ilahi Baksh Khan Maruf s) house in Delhi Maruf was a Persian poet of no mean merit

Little did Ghalib however, know at that stage that his fame in India would entirely rest on his Urdu ghazals and not on the Persian writings on which he prided himself so much But it is a pity that his Persian verses did not become popular even in Iran where this language is commonly spoken This has also been the fate of Sir Mohamed Iqbal s Persian poems He too set much store by his writings in that foreign language

The only Indian writer of Persian who finds a mention in Professor Edward G Browne s monumental work, *Literary History of Persian* is Amir Khusro The professor says "Good and chaste Persian has very rarely been produced or admired in Hindustan where we find a Baboo Persian precisely similar to Baboo English He adds Absurd exaggerations, recondite words vain epithets, far fetched comparisons and tasteless bombast represent to perfection the worst style of those florid writers who flouri

shed under the patronage of the Timurids in north eastern Persia and Transoxiana during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of our era and who unfortunately, passing with Babar into India, became models and examplers to the bombast loving people of that country Persian literature produced in India has not as a rule the real Persian flavour which belongs to the indigenous product "

Ghalib s prose works in Persian are *Panjahang, Mehri i-Neemroz* and *Dastanbo Panjahang*, which consists of five parts, contains his Persian letters which he wrote to his numerous friends and others before the Mutiny These throw a good deal of light on the conditions prevailing in the country in those days *Mehr i Neemroz* is the story of the Timur dynasty which Ghalib was commissioned to write in 1850 by King Bahadur Shah After he had completed the narrative from Amir Timur to Humayun s return to the throne, Bahadur Shah asked Ghalib to make it a history of the world from its very beginning The King deputed Hakim Ahsanullah Khan to assist Ghalib in this task The arrangement was that the Hakim would make the selections to be recorded from books of history and write them in Urdu Ghalib would then render them into Persian The first volume covering the period from the creation of the world to the times of Chengiz Khan was completed in 1852 The second volume, which was to be called *Mah i Neem Mah* was to tell the subsequent story of the world upto the reign of Bahadur Shah but it never saw the light of day as Hakim Ahsanullah Khan failed to do his part of the job in time In the mean time, the Mutiny broke out and put an end to the line of kings of the Timur dynasty

Dastanbo was written during the difficult days of 1857 when Ghalib had shut himself in his house It is an account of the stormy events that took place during the Mutiny and covers the period upto August 1858 Six out of its eighty pages are devoted to a *qasida* in praise of Queen Victoria There is a piece on the illuminations following the recapture

of Delhi by the British This book is in pure and orthodox Persian and the use of Arabic words has been restricted to the unavoidable proper names

The book that caused the biggest controversy in the realm of Persian literature of the post Mutiny period was Ghalib s *Qateh i Burhan* which was published in 1862 It is a critical commentary on the Persian dictionary *Burhan i Qateh* of Maulvi Mohammed Husain Tabrizi of the Deccan Ghalib found in it several contradictions and wrong definitions of words He also did not agree with many of the author s explanations As he read the dictionary, he made notes on the margin and finally compiled his objections in a book form It invited a flood of criticism as well as praise A Persian scholar, Syed Saadat Ali published a book, *Muharriq i Qateh i Burhan*, condemning Ghalib's work In reply, the Urdu poet s supporters brought out three pamphlets, one in Persian and two in Urdu These were followed by the publication of *Sateh i Burhan* in Persian by Mirza Rahim Beg of Meerut who also severely criticised Ghalib At this stage, the poet himself joined issue with the champions of Tabrizi s book and wrote a sixteen page rejoinder *Nama i Ghalib*, answering criticism of his book The critics were however, not to be silenced One of them wrote *Muaiyad i Burhan* to which the poet replied by bringing out *Tegh i Te*ʼ a journal of 32 pages Only the first issue appeared Someone then wrote *Tegh i Te tar* This war of books and pamphlets continued unabated and the last piece *Shamshir i Te'tar* written by Maulvi Ahmed Ali went unanswered due to Ghalib s death in 1869 Maulana Hali, writing in *Yadgar I Ghalib*, concedes that Ghalib was not always correct in his opinions but defends him on the plea that when he wrote *Qateh I Burhan* he did not have with him any authoritative books on Persian grammar and mostly went by his memory

One of the books written in condemnation of *Qateh I Burhan* used much vulgar language Its title was *Qateh ul Qateh* and the author Aminudin Amin was a teacher in a

Patiala School Ghalib decided to ignore it and when someone asked him why he had not replied to Amin's criticism he said "If a donkey kicks you, will you kick it back?" On reconsideration, however, he filed a case of defamation against the author in the court of the Deputy Commissioner Delhi, who was an Englishman Both sides produced a galaxy of learned witnesses and there was a good deal of hair splitting in the court on the meaning of certain words to prove whether they constituted abuse or not In the course of the trial Ghalib realised that it would be difficult to win the case and moved for a compromise which was reached through the good offices of some leading citizens He, however, wrote further comments and explanations on Tabrizi s dictionary and published in 1865 an enlarged edition of *Qateh i Burhan* now called *Durafsh i Kavyani*

The collection of Ghalib s Persian poems, entitled *Mekhana i Arzoo Saranjam* was published in 1845 It contained about 6,700 couplets His subsequent compositions in Persian were lost in the 1857 holocaust However, his poems composed between the Mutiny and 1862 were published in 1863 under the title of *Kulyat i Nazm i Farsi* It contains about 10,000 verses

Some smaller collections of Ghalib's Persian poems, including the famous Masnavi *Abr i Guharbar*, appeared under different titles like *Sabd i Chin*, *Bagh i Dodar* and *Dua i Sabah* A number of books which contain Ghalib s Persian letters and other writings and which were in the possession of persons who were in some way associated with the poet, have been published from time to time under various titles These include *Mutfarqat i Ghalib* and *Muasar i Ghalib* The *Masnavi* reveals what a tormented soul the poet was carrying In it he boldly expresses the feelings that crowded themselves in his mind when he reflected on the privations he had suffered and the enjoyments he had missed It is a strong apology to God for having taken to drinking though his religion forbade it A few of the verses when

would read as follows

I was sorrowful and wine takes away sorrow,
what could I do O the Merciful?

An account of wine, music, beauty and scent
should be demanded from Jamshid, Bahram and Parvez*,

But not from a poor man like me who now and then,
blackens his face with the fire of liquor

I had no garden where I could enjoy a drink,
nor a cellar in which I could store it,

No musician to amuse me,
nor a sweet heart to sit by me,

No fair faced dancers ever danced before me,
no noise of minstrels in my courtyard

I had many periods of privation and
many a spring without wine,

Days when rain gladdened the earth and
nights when the moon lit the sky
were dark in my eyes without a drop of wine

The cloud of the month of Bahman covered the horizon,
while my earthen cup remained as empty as ever

Many a spring found me searching for necessaries of life,
leaving the door of my house open
as there was nothing in it to protect

Many a time the world has been gay
with the rose and the tulip,
while I have lived moodily in my cell

Any moments of pleasure that fell to my lot
were like a dance of the half dead,

I never had a full measure of happiness
as was the desire of my heart

If I prepared a thread to make a necklace
the pearls would break,

And when wine was procured,
my cup got broken

Do not look at my dress besmeared with liquor,
but look at my emaciated frame

Thou has kept me poverty stricken,
but has kept my heart a prisoner of desires

The unpleasant time that I had
has turned life a thorn in my side

Whenever my heart boiled with desire,
a cry of pain reached my ear

When I remember my continued disappointments
my heart will not be at rest even in Paradise

For every sin that thine record may show against me
I shall cite a privation to show a desire unfulfilled

Then how O God, will justice be done
if my unfulfilled desires exceed the sins?

Ghalib s Persian writings, though not so wellknown in Iran have been admired by scholars of this language in India According to Maulana Hali and some other critics, his Persian works can compare favourably with those of the best writers of Persian including some of the old masters recognised in Iran itself Be that as it may, there is no denying the fact that Ghalib s Persian books are hardly in demand any more and adorn only the shelves of libraries and literary institutes However his Urdu Diwan which made him immortal will continue to be read and re read by those who follow Urdu, Hindi or Hindustani

7

WIT AND HUMOUR

Wit is the salt of conversation not the food —W Hazlitt

Happy is the man who can laugh at himself He will never cease to be amused —Habib Bourgiba

WIT AND HUMOUR PERMEATE through most of the writings and remarks of Mirza Ghalib Though he was a man of an extremely tender, loving and lovable nature, he always enjoyed an edge over others in repartee He did not spare even King Bahadur Shah and his courtiers whenever they tried to be funny with him He particularly relished his sallies at the rival poets and detractors whose criticism of his poems was motivated more by malice than a genuine love of the art of versification

It seems most of the wellknown writers in history were endowed with an abnormal dose of wit and banter Two of the greatest English authors William Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw, almost solely thrived on jests and jokes In America Mark Twain still rules supreme in the sphere of witty literature But Ghalib s humour is a class apart It is neither akin to the buffoonery of Shakespeare nor the farce of G B S nor even the facetiousness and comicality of Twain It is something sublime, self effacing

and highly subtle

In fact, it was Ghalib s rich sense of humour that carried this man of poor means through life which otherwise weighed heavily on him on account of his spendthrift nature, the stinginess of his patrons and the obduracy of government officials, besides some personal tragedies like the death of his father and uncle when he had not entered his teens and later of his seven children His joviality and vivacity stood him in good stead again and again and saved him many an awkward situation There are hundreds of anecdotes which show how quick witted was this genius of the realm of letters

Ghalib was very fond of mangoes and would go to any length to get fruit of really good quality His friends and admirers among whom were several Nawabs and noblemen, sent him baskets of the choicest varieties of mangoes from places as far away as Surat, Rampur and Bareilly Yet Ghalib s passion for them remained insatiable At a meeting where, besides Ghalib a number of nobles were present everybody was expatiating on the qualities of various types of this fruit When it came to the poet to express his views, he unhesitatingly declared "All mangoes must have two virtues—they must be sweet and plentiful'

Writing to a friend, he says "I cannot think of anything which I can ask you to send me from Surat What is there to be had which cannot be had here? No doubt, I like mangoes very much, not less than grapes But how can they reach here safely from Surat and Bombay? The *Malda* is known here as *Pewandi* and *Vilayati* They are fine indeed and they would be finer still at Surat but it seems you would be going out of the way to send them from there to Delhi The expense of sending mangoes worth a rupee would come to about four rupees by the parcel post and even then perhaps only ten out of a hundred will arrive here in a sound condition Please give up the idea of sending me any Delicious mangoes of every kind can be had here in plenty The Nawab

of Rampur often sends presents of fine fruit from his garden While I am writing this, I have just received two baskets of mangoes from a friend at Bareilly They have been opened in my presence but all except 83 out of 200 have become rotten

Once Ghalib was taking a walk with the King in a garden of mango trees laden with very tempting fruit The poet looked intently at the trees whereupon Bahadur Shah asked him what he was gazing at Ghalib recited a Persian couplet which says that there is not a single fruit in the world which has not got on it the name and parentage of the person who is destined to enjoy it He added 'I am looking at the mangoes to see if any of them bears my name on it' The King was very much pleased at the implied request and sent him a large quantity of different varieties of mangoes from the royal garden On another occasion, Ghalib wrote a nice little poem by way of thanks to the King for sending him mangoes

One day Ghalib was chatting in the verandah of his house with a friend Hakim Razi ud Din Khan who had a strong antipathy to mangoes Presently a donkey passed by, saw some mango skins, smelt them and walked away "You see sir remarked the Hakim "mango is a thing even a *donkey does not eat "Quite true quipped Ghalib* "a donkey does not eat it

When Nawab Allaudin Ahmed Khan invited Ghalib to Loharu, the poet wrote 'Am I blind that I should leave Delhi and go to Loharu at this time (it was the rainy season)? In that desert there are neither mangoes nor grapes nor any other attraction Sorry sir I can t visit you these days

There are scores of verses in Ghalib s Urdu Diwan which show how light hearted he was Once he read a ghazal in the presence of the King One of its couplets was

Ye masail i tasawwuf ye tera bayan Ghalib
Tujhe ham wali samajhte jo na badakhuar hota

(What mysticism and what a style ! We would have taken you for an apostle had you not been addicted to wine, O Ghalib)

On hearing it, Bahadur Shah teasingly remarked "We would not have considered you so (apostle) even then" Ghalib replied 'Your Majesty considers me so even now but has said it lest I should become boastful of my proximity to God'

Whenever a special dish was prepared in the palace, the King used to send a share of it to his courtiers and companions among whom was Ghalib The poet used to thank the royal patron by writing a *qata'* (stanza) on the subject He wrote the following two verses when the King sent him a loaf made from gram powder

Na poochh iski haqiqat hazur wala ne
Mujhe jo bheji hai besan ki roghni roti
Na khate gehun nikalte na khuld se bahar
Jo khate hazrate Adam ye besani roti

(Do not ask me to describe the taste of the buttered *besan* loaf which His Majesty has sent to me Only if Adam had eaten this loaf he would not have taken wheat and therefore been *thrown out of* Paradise)

At the time Bahadur Shah s servant brought the loaf Ghalib was explaining something to a student who had come from outside Delhi After the servant had left, the student, who was intrigued by this unusual gesture of the King, asked Ghalib what was so peculiar about the gram loaf that the King should have distributed it among his courtiers The poet replied "Listen, O fool It was gram that once complained to God thus, 'A great many cruelties are perpetrated on me in the world They crush me, grind me fry me boil me and eat hundreds of dishes made of me No one else suffers such barbarities' Thereupon, God said, 'O gram, you better remove yourself from my presence, because I also feel like eating you' '

Bahadur Shah was very fond of moong dal and it was frequently cooked in the royal kitchen Once he sent a bowlful to Ghalib who thanked the King by writing a quat rain praising the gift Another delicacy which he shared with the poet was prepared from seeds of *sem* (beans)

Ghalib spent his time playing chess and *chausar* with friends He was once hauled up on the charge of gambling and sent to jail for six months After serving half the term, he was released He want to live with Kale Khan who was *the King's spiritual mentor (Pir)* and *also* a *well wisher of* Ghalib A friend congratulated the poet on his release to which the latter replied ' Before this I was a prisoner of *gore* (white skinned, *i e* the British) and now I am a prisoner of *kale* (dark skinned) '

Ghalib had the gift of saying the right thing at the right moment Once a creditor sued him for breach of promise Addressing the judge, the poet said he knew what the outcome of his debt would be but in spite of that he took the loan, and so the sentence of the judge would not make much diffe rence to him At this the judge was so pleased that he acquitted Ghalib and paid his debt from his own poket

Like Dickens humour with Ghalib was a way of life Even in his despondency he took resort to it

Hai khabar garm unke aane ki
Aaj hi ghar men boriya na hua

She—the beloved—is expected today I wish there was a gunny bag in the house—possibly to give her a surprise by hiding)

After the Mutiny had been suppressed, most leading Muslims of Delhi left the city fearing persecution at the hands of the British Ghalib, however, stayed put in his house in Ballimaran in Chandni Chowk One day a few white soldiers *forcibly entered his residence although the guards posted there by the Maharaja of Patiala tried to stop them* Ghalib writes in *Dastanbo* that they did not damage or loot any article but only took him along with his servants and some neighbours to Colonel Brown who was staying in a nearby

building that belonged to Haji Qutb ud Din Looking at the poet s cap, the colonel asked 'Well, are you a Muslim ?' Ghalib replied 'Sir, only half 'What do you mean ?" said the officer The poet clarified "I drink wine and do not take pork' The colonel laughed Then Ghalib showed him the letter which he had received from the Secretary of State acknowledging receipt of the *qasida* which the poet had written in praise of Queen Victoria 'Why did you not present yourself on the Ridge after the victory of the Sarkar ?' asked Brown "I was a commander of four palanquin bearers All of them ran away How could I then present myself ?" Ghalib replied The Colonel thereupon sent him and his companions back home with due courtesies

A well wisher of Ghalib, Munshi Moti Lal, who was a head clerk in the Punjab Secretariat of the British Government, called on him after the Mutiny was over The poet s pension had not yet been restored nor had he been allowed to resume his position at the durbar He therefore broached the subject with the visitor and declared 'Call me a *kafir* (non believer) if I have remained without wine for a single day and a sinner if I have offered *nama* (prayer) even once Still I am being treated as a rebel Muslim !' All that Ghalib wanted to emphasize in his own humorous way was that he was too much of a latitudinarian to be a fanatic

Similarly, in one of his quatrains, Ghalib says "Let those observe fast (*roza*) who have the wherewithal to feast in the evening But he who has nothing to eat when he breaks his fast should be excused if he eats the fast itself

The King once asked Ghalib at the end of the month of Ramzan how many fasts he had observed 'I did not observe one fast replied the poet This could mean that he had observed all the fasts except one and also that he had not fasted even for a day which in reality was the case

Ghalib went to Rampur to meet Nawab Kalab Ali Khan He reached there at a time when the latter was about to proceed to Bareilly where he had been called by the Lieute

nant Governor As the Nawab rose to go, he told Ghalib '*I leave you with God*' *The poet replied* '*Sir, it was God* who sent me to you and you are sending me back to Him' meaning that he had come to the Nawab as he (the poet) was poor and the latter rich, all handiwork of God

Ghalib used to receive anonymous letters from his rivals *and detractors These often contained filthy abuses He* opened one such letter in the presence of Maulana Hali It abused the poet's mother Ghalib laughed and said 'The fool does not know how to abuse It is the daughter who should be abused in the case of an old man like me for the young man the abuse should be directed at his wife the mother should be the target while abusing a child

Ghalib s witty remarks became so popular that his friends and admirers flocked to him all the time Every remark that escaped his lips caused amusement among the listeners His contemparary the court poet Zauq was his principal rival though outwardly the two pretended great respect and regard *for each other At a get together Ghalib was praising the* verse of Mir Taqi Mir whereupon Zauq declared that Sauda was far superior to Mir Ghalib rejoined, '*I thought you were* Miri (protagonist of Mir) but now I find you are *saudai* (an insane person) '

Ghalib had a legitimate pride in the nobility of his birth and attached an almost fantastic value to the maintenance of his dignity There are a few interesting anecdotes about his sense of self respect and love of independence When the old Delhi College was founded, there was a vacancy in it for a professor of Oriental Literature Ghalib made up his mind to apply for the job He went to see a high Government *official in this connection but as he was not received by the* officer on this occasion in the manner to which he was accus tomed Ghalib plainly told him that he had come with the intention of asking for the job but had changed his mind because he was not received with the customary ceremony which had usually characterised his reception on other occa

sions The official explained that the previous interviews were in his (Ghalib s) capacity as a leading citizen while on this particular occasion he had come to ask for a job Ghalib replied that he would rather go without the emoluments of the post than suffer a diminution of his respectability

Like a true Oriental, Ghalib extended his hospitality to everybody who visited him although his pecuniary condition was none too satisfactory He never went out without his palanquin carried by four persons and met the nobles and other elite of the city on equal terms He made it a point to call on all those who visited him One day Dewan Fazal Allah Khan passed by Ghalib s house in a horse drawn carriage but did not stop to exchange greetings with him The poet sent him a note saying 'I feel thoroughly ashamed today What greater offence can there be than that you should pass by my house and I should not be there to pay you my respects? The Dewan immediately made amends for his lapse by visiting the poet in the same carriage

When Ghalib called on Nawab Mustafa Khan unexpectedly one evening, the latter asked if he had come straight from his house or had visited someone else on the way The poet replied that he owed an anna to a certain person and had gone there first to make the payment This shows how devastatingly frank he was

Ghalib s admirers including men of high status were always keen to do him a good turn One day Ghalib lay in bed obviously feeling tired Mir Majruh began pressing his feet to give him relief from pain You are son of a Syed (high caste Muslim) Why do you want to load me with a sin? remonstrated Ghalib Majruh replied "If you think so, you may pay me for my services As he was about to leave he jokingly demanded his wages Ghalib said What wages? You robbed me of my fatigue and I robbed you of yours money! That squares it up

As Ghalib was taking his dinner one hot evening Maulana Hali began airing him with a handkerchief 'You need not

try to please me, I am not going to leave any kabab for you' said Ghalib Then he related the following story "Dishes of many kinds were laid in the dining room of Nawab Abdul Ahad Khan to suit the taste of his companions, friends and relatives He himself was however, served a special delicacy which was given to no one else One night *ma-afar* (a dish containing costly ingredients) was prepared and placed in front of him Among those present was a Dom (member of a low caste) who was a great favourite of the Nawab The latter sent for an empty plate so that he could give part of his dish to the Dom who was looking at it greedily There was some delay in the plate being brought Meanwhile, the Nawab went on eating but at the same time calling for the plate The Dom could no longer restrain himself and said 'Sir there is no need for another plate This plate (from which the Nawab was eating) itself is going to turn empty' Everybody laughed and the Nawab passed on the plate to the menial with whatever was left in it

On an inquiry from Mir Majruh if he was receiving his pension all right, Ghalib wrote "I have learnt the art of living without a livelihood You need have no anxiety on that account The month of Ramzan I spent eating fasts and as for the future I leave it to God If I get nothing else I can easily live on sorrow"

A friend, Syed Sardar Mirza, visited him late in the evening As he got up to leave, Ghalib, who was then very old and could not walk crawled to the door with a candle in hand so that the visitor could locate his shoes 'For God s sake, don t trouble yourself I shall myself find my shoes protested the friend 'It is not that I brought the candle to make sure that you don t put on my shoes, said Ghalib

Someone wrote to Ghalib telling him about the death of the second wife of his disciple Umrao Singh and the bereaved husband s desire to marry for the third time so that the new wife could look after his children Ghalib

wrote back as follows 'I pity as well as envy Umrao Singh My God! Here is a man who twice got rid of his shackles and yet does not want to remain free On the other hand, I have been carrying a noose (referring to his own wife) round my neck for the last 51 years, it neither breaks nor does it strangle me to death Tell this fellow not to make this mistake again I am willing to take care of his children

Ghalib was sick of domestic affairs On a winter morning he saw a parrot sitting in a corner of the cage with the head drawn between the wings Addressing it the poet remarked 'O sweet tongued you have neither a wife nor children What are you then worried about?

Ghalib wanted to rent a new house He saw one and liked the sitting room but before finalizing the deal, he sent his wife to inspect the ladies apartment She told him that the house was reported to carry a curse Can there be a bigger curse than you?' Ghalib asked

The poet was so much weighed down by age and worries that he began to pray for death Meanwhile, an epidemic broke out in Delhi Mir Majruh who lived in Panipat made anxious inquiries about his health Ghalib wrote 'Damn this epidemic that cannot kill even seventy year old men and women

In his correspondence with friends and admirers the poet was absolutely informal He enjoyed cutting jokes with them even in his letters He wrote to a friend in the last week of December 1858 The friend received the communication on the first of January 1859, and sent his reply the same day In his next letter Ghalib complained My dear you replied in 1859 to a letter sent to you in 1858 This I don t like and on the top of it if I point it out, you will say 'I replied to your letter the same day

Ghalib was at his humorous best when describing his own poverty and plight His house was in utter disrepair for lack of funds During the rains, it leaked and the

walls turned green due to the growth of moss on them Ghalib wrote a couplet which typifies his sense of humour and at the same time tells us how hard up he was

Ug raha hai dar o deevar se sabza Ghalib
Ham byaban men ham aur ghar men bahar aaee hai

(Grass is growing on the door and walls of my house It is a pity that I happen to be in a desolate place just when *spring is visiting my home*)

Writing to a friend about his house Ghalib says The sitting room is in a worse condition than the ladies apartment I am not afraid of death It is lack of rest that is worrying me The roof has turned into a sieve If it rains for two hours, the roof continues to leak for four hours '

At a literary get together in Lucknow where Ghalib happened to be present (he had broken journey on his way to Calcutta) the talk turned to Urdu as it was spoken in Delhi and Lucknow Somebody addressing Ghalib remarked ' When the people in Delhi refer to themselves they say *apne tayeen* while in Lucknow they say *aapko* Which expression you think is better? Ghalib replied '*Aap* seems to be more elegant but then there is a snag in it For example if you say about me that you regard *aapko* (me) a paragon of virtue and in reply I say about myself that I regard *aapko* worse than a dog it will lead to a serious misunderstanding Though I shall make this remark about myself you will possibly think I am saying it about you In Urdu, the word *aap* is used both while referring to oneself as well as the addressee Ghalib acquainted his listeners with the absurdity of this expression in a way that served the purpose as well as caused a good laugh

The peculiarity of the Urdu language is brought out in another joke associated with Ghalib In Urdu as also in Hindi, every noun animate or inanimate has either a masculine or a feminine gender For example the sky the sun the moon, tree house (*makan*) and water are masculine

while the earth the air, building (*imarat*), book and table are feminine Ghalib was asked if *rath* (chariot) was masculine or feminine He replied "Call it feminine if there are ladies in it and masculine if the occupants are men '

In the daytime in summer, Ghalib sat in a small dingy and dark anteroom on the first floor of his house Its door was so small that one had to stoop to enter it A mattress was the only item of furniture in it In this room on a hot afternoon in the month of Ramzan, Ghalib was playing *chausar* with a friend Unexpectedly a venerable personality, Maulana Azurd walked in and was struck aghast to see the poet gambling ' I had read in the *Hadis* (traditional sayings of Prophet Mohammed) that Satan remains imprisoned during Ramzan but today my faith in this saying is wavering ' said the visitor Pat came the reply from Ghalib 'Sir, the *Hadis* is absolutely correct But you should know that the place where Satan remains shut up is this very closet

Influential people used to pester Ghalib with requests to write couplets signifying their or their son's date of birth and their calendar name This was also a practice peculiar to the Orient To write such a verse called for a good deal of calculation and laborious arrangement of words All the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet have their value in numbers When the numerical equivalents of all the letters of a verse are added up one can arrive at the year of one s birth or death If the value of the letters of a person s name is the same as his year of birth it becomes his calendar name Ghalib was not particularly fond of this vogue When Nawab Allaudin Khan wrote to him to compose a verse signifying the date of birth of his son and to give him a calendar name, the poet replied ' The tiger feeds his cubs on a fresh kill and teaches them how to hunt for food when they grow up You are a poet and God has given you ability Why don t you write a verse on the birth date of your son and give him a calendar name? Why harass a heart broken and grief stricken man like me? Allaudin Khan, I swear by

your life The first son whose calendar name I wrote did not live This has made me doubt if it was not due to my ill luck Whom I praise do not survive Nasirudin Haider and Amjad Ali Shah died after I had written only one *qasida* in praise of each Wajid Ali Shah (King of Oudh) could stand no more than three *qasidas* and that was the end of him Ten or twenty *qasidas* by me will take the per son praised even beyond the world of non existence No sir, God be merciful I shall not compose the date of birth nor find out the calendar name of your son Thus without displeasing the Nawab Ghalib excused himself from an em barrassing request

A few years before he passed away, Ghalib wrote his own probable date of death It was the year 1277 according to the Islamic calendar By a coincidence an epidemic broke out in the city the same year but the poet survived it He wrote to a friend "The prediction about my death was not wrong that is, I *should* have died in that year But I thought it unbecoming of me to die in an epidemic It was cer tainly below my dignity to do so I shall now sort it out after the pestilence has blown over

After Ghalib's death on February 15 1869 several verses and phrases appeared in Urdu newspapers and journals concerning this event The phrase that won the largest measure of agreement among poets and the people was

Ah! Ghalib bamurd (*Ah! Ghalib is dead*)

His numerous disciples and other poets wrote elegies on him both in Urdu and Persian Ghalib had anticipated this and had said on one occasion

Wehshat o Shefta ab mersia likhen shayad
Margaya Ghalib ashufta nava kehte hain

(Wehshat and Shefta will perhaps write elegies now Ghalib is dead say the distressed voices)

Syed Ghulam Ali Khan Wehshat and Nawab Mustafa Khan Shefta were among Ghalib s poet friends They also got their compositions corrected by him

8

LOVE OF WINE

I wonder often what the Vintners buy
One half so precious as the stuff they sell
—Omar Khayyam (Fitzgerald translation)

Despicable is he who seeks pleasure from wine
All I need is forgetfulness of self day and night
—Ghalib (Author's translation)

Poetry and wine are perhaps inseparable if we go by the record of versifiers, particularly of the East The beloved, the moon, the cloud, the rose, the nightingale, the glow worm—all these and many more manifestations of beauty and grace have fired the imagination of poets the world over and down the millennium but the thing that sustained them and their Muse through thick and thin has been the little goblet or the cup of wine their most indispensable accoutrement

Most of Mirza Ghalib s verses are on love despair and wine Those on love mainly allude to God and are free from obscenity and lewdness His life was a long tale of despair and disappointment which made him take a sympathetic view of man s failings instead of making him bitter and spiteful This is because he found a good companion in wine which he compares to the breeze in spring

Hai kara men sharab ki tasir
Bad-noshi hai baad-i-paimaee

(The breeze has the effect of wine It has made drinking superfluous)

Though alcohol shattered Ghalib s health notwithstanding the virtues he ascribed to it his verse received from it lustre and nourishment Whatever else he might miss he could not afford to miss his glass of wine When he had no money he borrowed from friends or bought his requirements on credit He was so much enamoured of wine that when a pious celebrity condemned his habit and warned him against God not accepting his prayers the poet replied What is left to pray for when I get wine in plenty?

Whenever anybody invited him to prayers, Ghalib excused himself by saying that the prayer hour clashed with his drinking time Once he persuaded himself to visit a mosque but left it without saying the prayer It became known later that a servant had procured a bottle of whisky and rushed to the mosque to show it to Ghalib The poet who was in the midst of *wa oo* (ablutions) could not wait for the *nama*- to be over

During his return journey from Rampur to Delhi in 1860 Ghalib stayed for sometime in Moradabad He passed the first night in an inn but when Sir Syed Ahmed Khan who was in town heard of the poet s presence, he took him to his residence Out of consideration for his well being Sir Syed concealed Ghalib s bottle of wine he was carrying with him in the store room The poet was alarmed when he discovered that the bottle was missing Sir Syed tried to reassure him but the poet insisted on seeing it He was thereupon taken to the store room There he protested that someone had used the wine for the bottle was not as full as when he had brought it He jokingly accused his host of having cheated him Knowing the guest s nature, Sir Syed laughed away the remark

When Ghalib was well off, he ate only the core of chapatis and cast away the corners but when adversity elbowed out Dame Fortune he ate those dry crumbs with wine He once said

Ghalib ki faqa masti par qurban jaun
Sookhe tukre bhi khata hai sharab men dubokar

(Admirable is the way Ghalib enjoys his poverty he eats dried crumbs soaked in wine)

One day there was nothing in the house to eat Ghalib s wife reminded him that he had not drawn his pension from the court for some time As he was returning from the Red Fort with money in his pocket, he entered a wine shop, settled his old account bought a couple of bottles and deposited the balance with the barman as advance for future use He often used to recite this couplet

Qaraz ki peete the men lekin samajhte the ye ham
Rang laegi hamari faqa masti ek din

(No doubt I borrowed money to buy liquor but I knew my privations would bring a change in my life some day)

The change they brought was an enhancement in the beauty and richness of his verse

Added to Ghalib s privations was the feeling of solitude in his heart owing to the lack of a suitable companion in life His wife was an extremely pious and religious lady who devoted most of her time to prayers and the observance of fasts She could not appreciate her husband s literary talents and thinking Their marriage therefore was at best a tie of duty and convention

A thing that had a depressing effect on the poet s mind was the death of all his seven children one after the other He was left without an issue in his old age He and his wife lavished their affection on an adopted son but unfortunately this boy also died

The evening of Ghalib's life was further embittered by various physical ailments No wonder he took to the

solace of the cup in which he wanted to drown his misery Even when he was too old and weak to hold the cup, he insisted on wine being kept before him so that he could feast his eyes on it

Go hath ko junbish nahin aankhon men to dam hai
Rehne do abhi sagar o meena mire aage

(Though I cannot move my hand my vision is still all right Let the wine and cup remain in front of me)

Another pathetic couplet on the subject is

Ata hai dagh i hasrat i dil ka shumar yaad
Mujh se mire gunah ka hisab ai Khuda na maang

(It reminds me of the number of sore spots in my heart owing to longings unfulfilled Do not O God, ask me to render an account of my sins)

In this one verse is condensed the entire thought and philosophy of Ghalib How beautifully he has conveyed the idea that the sins committed by man in his life time are bound to be numerous and that feeble humanity is always strug gling heroically against alluring temptations! It is a bold and straightforward expression of the feelings that crowded them selves into the heart of the poet on reflecting that in his life there had been a large number of enjoyments omitted even if there had been some moments enjoyed

Some of his other verses on wine are

Men aur bazm i mae se yon tishnakaam aun
Gar men ne ki thi toba saqi ko kya hua tha

(It is unthinkable that I should return thirsty from a meet ing If I had resisted the temptation to drink what prevented the barman from forcing it on me?)

Hareef i joshish i darya nahin khud dari sahil
Jahan saqi ho to da ava hai batal hoshiari ka

(However hard it may try the bank cannot save itself when the river is in spate just as one cannot be too clever inside a bar)

Mujh tak kab unki bazm men ata tha daur i jam
Saqi ne kuchh mila na diya ho sharab men

(The glass of wine rarely reached me in his assembly The fact that today it was passed on to me makes me doubt if the barman might not have mixed something—poison—in it)

Jab maekada chhuta to fir ab kya jagah ki qaid
Masjid ho madrasa ho koee khanqah ho

(After the tavern had been abandoned—where I could drink in the company of rivals—I am not particular about the choice of place It may as well be a mosque a school or a monastery i e I am willing to drink at any of these places)

Pila de oak se saqi jo munh se nafrat hai
Piala gar nahin deta na de sharab to de

(Let me O barman drink from my hand if you dislike my using your cup Give me wine if you do not want me to touch the cup)

Kyon radd i qadah kare hai zahid
Mae hai ye magas ki qae nahin hai

(Why argue *i e* reject the cup O holy man? It is *wine* not something vomitted by a bee i e honey)

Vaiz na tum piyo na kisi ko pila sako
Kya baat hai tumhari sharab i tahur ki

(You neither drink O preacher nor make others drink what spiritual wine you keep!)

Kehte huye saqi se haya aati hai mujh ko
Hai yon ke mujhe durd i te jam bahut hai

(I hesitate to tell the barman but the fact is that I can be content with the remnants of the cup)

Notwithstanding the voluminous evidence we have on Ghalib s weakness for wine he was a moderate drinker except as a youth when he drank three or four times a day Later, however he followed Omar Khayyam s advice—drink little, drink occasionally and drink secretly—and fixed the

quantity permissible to himself Gradually he gave up drinking in daytime altogether He restricted it to just one drink before going to bed Moreover, he mixed two or three parts of rose water in the wine to make it mild In this regard, there is a couplet by Mir Majruh

Ghalib aae hain lau ai Majruh
Bada i nab men mila ke gulab

(Ghalib has arrived Bring O Majruh pure wine mixed in rose water)

According to Maulana Hali the key of the cupboard containing the wine bottles remained with the watchman who had strict instructions not to let the poet open it at night But sometimes in a state of ecstasy Ghalib insisted on drinking more than the fixed quantity and rebuked the watchman for not obeying his orders but the latter would not oblige

Once or twice Ghalib swore that he would not touch liquor any more but the pledge was broken before it was made In this connection the poet writes Two of my friends urged me to give up drinking in the name of religion but I was not taken in by their talk and I did not stop drinking Thereupon they played another trick on me They persuaded the shopkeeper from whom I used to buy liquor on credit not to sell it to me any more Incidentally, his bill too had run up considerably and he refused me any further credit An empty cup and an empty pocket! What could I do? Had I cash I could have got my supply from somewhere else but how can there be cash with Ghalib? '

It appears that due to financial stringency Ghalib had to do without drinking for some time but whenever he got a chance he did not let it slip

Ghalib chhuti sharab par ab bhi kabhi kabhi
Peeta hun roz i abr shab-i mahatab men

(Ghalib has given up wine but even so he takes it when there is a cloudy day or a moonlit night)

After the Mutiny but before his pension was restored, Ghalib wrote to Mir Majruh "It is morning and bitterly cold A brazier has been placed in front of me After writing every second word I warm up my hands This fire may have heat but not that flame that runs through every vein the moment you gulp down two draughts the heart is strengthened, the head becomes clearer and the voice gets vigorous But this devotee of the barman of Paradise goes about thirsty! Ah how terrible how terrible!"

Ghalib s favourite drink was Scotch Whisky He particularly liked a brand called Old Tom and in one of his letters goes lyrical over its virtues In his prose writings, he has praised Scotch as well as champagne and various Spanish and Portuguese wines But all these became scarce during the Mutiny and the prices shot up (of course not in the manner they do now) A bottle that sold for Rs 2 (Ah the good old days!) went up to Rs 5 Ghalib found it too expensive He switched over to the indigenous product Occasionally he brewed it in his house also

9

FRIENDS, PUPILS AND CONTEMPORARIES

Mirza Ghalib had scores of friends and admirers all over the country and was in constant correspondence with most of them. He was always full of sympathy for those who suffered on any account or were faced with any difficulties. His letters show how much affection he had for each one of them, never sparing expense or effort for their sake. They in turn had the greatest admiration and regard for his personality and reciprocated his feelings with love and sincerity.

Though Ghalib himself lived for the most part from hand to mouth, no one informed him of his misery or sorrow without eliciting from him a suitable response. He was ever willing to extend pecuniary help to his friends and so were they when it became known that the poet was in trouble. With him it was an article of faith to make sacrifices in the cause of friendship. Besides, adversity had made him tender towards those who suffered like him. If he himself could not do a good turn to the needy, he would persuade some rich patron to come forward with help.

That Ghalib stood by his friends even at a heavy cost to himself can be seen from the way he supported the claims of

Aminudin Ahmed Khan and Ziaudin Ahmed Khan younger brothers of Nawab Shamsudin Ahmed Khan Had Ghalib chosen to side with the Nawab instead of his brothers, who were his friends in their quarrel over the division of their father's estates, he would not have lost his pension [1]

When rumours spread in Delhi about the death of the Raja of Bharatpur, Ghalib became extremely worried about his friends in that ruler s employment He wrote to Tafta to find out the true position and reply to him by the next post To make sure that the letter reached the addressee he did not affix a postage stamp and instructed Tafta also to send a bearing cover Until not long ago people in India believed that the best way to ensure delivery of a letter was to send it bearing so that the postman took special care to collect the dues from the addressee

Ghalib s local friends visited him regularly His house was the meeting place of all his cronies There they chatted and played chess or *chausar* He entertained them beyond his means and shared their joys and sorrows His friends and admirers in other towns unfailingly called on him whenever they came to Delhi They also sent him gifts especially his favourite fruit mangoes The rich among them sometimes enclosed in their letters small amounts of money as they knew the poet s spendthrift habits

Among Ghalib s intimate friends were a large number of Hindus This shows that he was free from any kind of religious or racial prejudice Munshi Jawahar Singh Jauhar was the first to collect and publish his Urdu letters Another of his Hindu admirers was Rai Bahadur Pyare Lal an eminent educationist of Punjab Several Hindu friends helped him during the Mutiny when Ghalib had shut himself in his house out of fear and when all his sources of livelihood had disappeared [2]

1 See Chapter II Fight for Pension page 19

2 See Chapter III The Mutiny and After page 35

The number of Ghalib s pupils was legion They belonged to various walks of life Among them were rulers of States and Princes like Nizam, Betab and Taufiq, Government servants like Zaka Qadar and Tafta respectable intellectuals like Shefta, Arshi and Haqir, and ordinary educated men like Munas, Dard and Aram After Zauq s death, the King too had his poems corrected by Ghalib The heir apparent, Mirza Fakhroo, and Bahadur Shah s youngest son, Mirza Khizr Sultan, were also in his tutorship The circle went on widening until Ghalib became bedridden Even then he carried on his labour of love with surprising regularity

The practice of younger and immature poets getting their compositions improved by a well established author came to India from Iran where from very early times it had been customary for men of aristocratic families to take to the writing of poetry They assumed poetical names and got themselves apprenticed to some renowned master to whom they paid a regular stipend or made occasional presents There also used to be some young gifted poets who could not afford to pay a fee to their mentors The latter not infrequently corrected their verses free of charge in order to encourage talent and also to boost the number of their own admirers Ghalib however did this work in a selfless manner and never boasted about the number of his pupils or the high status of some of them Quite a big portion of the money he received by way of pensions and stipends from the courts of various rulers he spent on helping poor writers among whom were several of his pupils

In his desire to help them as much as possible Ghalib not only made corrections in the compositions submitted to him but also wrote additional explanatory notes and directions in letters accompanying the corrected sheets Two of his best known pupils were Tafta and Hali who later wrote his biography (*Yadgar i Ghalib*) Commenting on a Persian *qasida* sent by Tafta Ghalib wrote 'Well done What a nice *qasida* you have [illegible] n' The continuity of sense and the

simplicity of words are entitled to praise, One of your lines coincides with a line of a verse of Shaukat of Bokhara, that is *Chak gardidamo az jaib badaman raftam* I think you may well be proud of your thought having reached the same height as that of Shaukat in this line, but the line preceding this in your poem does not compare well with the corresponding line of Shaukat It would have made me much happier if you had equalled or excelled him in that line also What Ghalib in reality wanted to tell Tafta was that the latter had unashamedly failed in the act of piracy

In the same letter Ghalib advises Tafta not to write ghazals and *qasidas* according to the letters of the alphabet The method followed by most Persian and Urdu poets was, if they were making a collection of poems to write them ending with each letter of the alphabet This led to much artificiality A poet might not have very much to say which would give him an adequate number of verses ending in a particular letter of the alphabet The result was that his search for words that ended in the desired letter and then reshaping of the verse in order to contain such words would stand in the way of free flow of thoughts Such verses invariably lost much of the subtlety of idea and elegance of idiom Poetry of this kind was often found to be a mere form without any life or soul in it Ghalib therefore asked Tafta and his other pupils to try to compress more sense and thought in what they wrote and be guided by the inspiration of the moment rather than act according to tradition and common practice He did not want them to pack their ghazals and *qasidas* with unnecessary wordage and uncalled for jargon Quality rather than quantity should be their aim, he told them again and again

Persian and Urdu writers had another peculiar habit They sent their books to friends for writing a *taqriz* (eulogistic cummentary) on them The review highly praised the work irrespective of the fact whether the friend to whom a book was submitted actually thought highly of the effort or not It was

taken for granted that the comment must invariably be in laudatory terms Such comments were then published along with the book as testimony of its excellence A good deal of undeserved praise was this way wasted on mediocre writers The readers too understood this and attached little value to the testimonials

Ghalib did not like the practice of showering undeserved praise on each and every piece of writing and tried to combat this evil He tried to be as fair in his comments as possible even when the subject matter under review had come from a friend or pupil It appears that Tafta sent his book to Ghalib for writing a *taqri-* The latter was not particularly impressed by his pupil s achievement and therefore gave it only mild praise whereupon Tafta complained that he had been treated unkindly by the master Ghalib replied 'I cannot give up my principles I do not know that style of Indian writers of Persian in which they begin to praise like the professional Bhats (singers) Look at my *qasidas* You will find that verses on general subjects of a literary nature are far more in number than those devoted to the eulogy of the person concerned The same principle I follow in my prose Look at the *taqri-* I wrote on the book of Nawab Mustafa Khan and see how small is the space devoted in it to his praise See again the preface I wrote to the *Diwan* of Mirza Rahim ud Din Haya or the *taqri-* I wrote at the instance of Mr John Jacob to his edition of *Diwan i Hafi-* There is only one verse in his praise while the rest of it is on other interesting topics I assure you that if I had written a preface to a collection of poems of a prince I would not have given him more space than I have given to appreciation of your work If you knew this peculiarity of mine you would have regarded the praise I have given you as adequate To have introduced this reform in Urdu literary criticism in defiance of the practice in vogue at that time and at the risk of displeasing his friends and pupils was really brave of Ghalib

Ghalib wanted his pupils to follow his instructions very

strictly In no case would he relax these whatever the status of the disciple concerned They were told to write their compositions in a clear hand leaving ample space between the lines to enable him to make the necessary changes His own handwriting was very elegant in spite of the fact that he wrote at a fast speed Another directive he had given to his pupils was to use paper of a fine quality He welcomed any number of questions on the changes made by him but discouraged the taking of a rigid attitude on any issue

Ghalib was outspoken and sincere in whatever he said or did and wanted others to be frank and honest in their utterances and deeds When he made a promise he did so with all seriousness and felt slighted if any body disbelieved him Once when he ran out of his own book of poems, he wrote to a pupil who was also related to him, to lend him his copy The latter refused to oblige him perhaps thinking that he might lose a book which was so precious to him This upset Ghalib who sent to the pupil a sharp note saying "Have you thrown to the winds our relationship of uncle and nephew, master and pupil? God knows what you would have done had I asked for a thing costing five hundred or a thousand rupees! Besides I am not asking you to part with your book for ever You are welcome to keep it I just want to see it and copy the portions which I do not have Then I shall return it Your refusal to accede to my request only shows that you consider me a liar and you do not want to trust me! Or you wish to harass and tease me

A letter to Nawab Allaudin Khan says I again wrote to you that I did not keep the manuscript of the *qasida* I also wrote that I do not remember which *rubais* you want Still you write 'send me the *rubais* send me the *qasida* meaning thereby that I am a liar and that this time I would send them Brother I swear by the Quran the New Testament, the Old Testament the Psalms of David and the four Vedas of the Hindus that neither have I the *qasida* nor I remember those *rubais*

Ghalib considered the standard of his own writings far above that of any of his contemporaries And this finally turned out to be true judging from the extent of fame he achieved as compared to other Urdu poets but not so in the case of his Persian compositions In Persian he compared himself with the great ones of Iran, both past and present He refused to concede superiority to any writer in the matter of idiom and grammatical expression He likened the old masters such as Khusro and Sa adi to a lamp and himself to the sun' This kind of attitude often landed him into bitter controversies

At mushairas, it was not Ghalib s habit, as was the case with most other poets to acclaim indiscriminately every verse that was recited, irrespective of its merit He chose for praise only the really good ones Many of his contemporaries felt offended at his supposed indifference towards their compositions and this sometimes led to a vile criticism of his own poetry It did not however deflect him from the right course

Ghalib also did not believe in an uncritical adoption of the styles of the masters of the past Do not think what they have written is authentic were not fools born in that age too? he tells Tafta in a letter He did not care if his adherence to his convictions annoyed the court circles However, he readily aceepted any genuine suggestion for improving his verses He did change some of them as a result of critical comments by others All the same he carried the impression that his verses were not adequately appreciated He has frequently complained about it in his writings Once on return from the Fort he went straight to Nawab Mustafa Khan and said Today the King Emperor greatly appreciated my efforts In order to offer him Id greatings I wrote a *qasida* in his honour After I had read it out His Majesty observed, Mirza you recite very well The implication was that the King was impressed more by his manner of declamation than by the merit of the poem For a long time

the Mirza and the Nawab talked about the ingratitude of the world

It immensely gladdened the poet s heart if someone genuinely congratulated him on the excellence of his poems When Munshi Nabi Baksh Haqir, a renowned critic of his day, stayed with Ghalib during a visit to Delhi, the latter wrote to Tafta God has taken pity on my helplessness and solitariness and sent to me a man who brought with him balm for my wounds and a cure for my pain He has turned my dark night into a bright day With his talk he has lighted a candle which showed to me the worth of my poetry—worth that had remained hidden from my own eyes due to my mis fortune I am surprised to find this man s, that is Munshi Nabi Baksh s great gift of understanding and appreciating a verse It is said that God divided beauty into two equal halfs One half He gave to Yousaf and the other half to the rest of mankind I shall not be surprised if poetic understand ing and appreciation too has been divided into two parts one part going to Munshi Nabi Baksh and the other to the rest of the world! Though the world and the heavens may well be my enemies, I am no longer worried over it due to my friendship with this man I am fully satisfied with this blessing '

In 1828 when Ghalib visited Calcutta in connection with his pension case he clashed there with local writers who were admirers of Qateel another Indian poet who wrote in Persian Qateel was a convert from Hinduism and was known as Diwali Singh before he became a Muslim 'Who is Qateel? asked Ghalib adding contemptuously, that Khatri son of Faridabad? Am I to accept this mean fellow as an authority? This raised a veritable storm and led to exchange of angry arguments between the protagonists of the two poets The campaign and counter campaign were later carried on through the columns of the local language press so much so that people started passing remarks against Ghalib as he walked through the streets However thinking discretion to

better part of valour in a hostile city, he wrote in Persian on the advice of his well wishers a *masnavi* entitled *Baad i Mukhalaf*. In it he stated the object of his visit to Calcutta and regretted the controversy that had developed. He did not mean to show disrespect to his elders and bring bad name to his city (Delhi). He implored all those who had been offended to forgive and forget. Towards the end of the poem he even praised Qateel though one could not help reading sarcasm in between the lines.

At another literary get together in Calcutta where Ghalib was also present someone spoke highly of Faizee. "Faizee is not as great as people think," said Ghalib. This remark was resented and the man who had praised Faizee then related an incident. "When Faizee went to Akbar for the first time he recited a *qasida* of 250 verses on the spur of the moment," declared this man. Ghalib replied, "With God's grace even now there are persons who can recite extempore a few couplets, if not a few hundred." Faizee's supporter took out of his pocket a shining piece of stone and requested Ghalib to say something on it. The Mirza recited eleven verses one after the other.

Ghalib's principal contemporary and rival was Sheikh Mohammed Ibrahim Zauq who by virtue of his being the King's *ustad* (teacher) and also on account of the excellence of his own compositions commanded considerable respect in the court circles and outside. In fact some critics do regard Zauq as greater than Ghalib. Among them is Maulana Mohammed Hussain Azad the author of *Aab i Hayat* which is a comprehensive history of Urdu literature. Ghalib however showed utter contempt whenever Zauq's name was mentioned. Had Zauq not been the King's literary adviser Ghalib perhaps would have behaved differently. Zauq is undoubtedly one of the greatest masters of Urdu verse and in simplicity of style and in the beauty and flow of his language has few equals. But as a genius and thinker Ghalib is considered much superior to Zauq.

Zauq (1794 1854) was the son of a soldier but was gifted with the poet's imagination and a teacher s intellect He adopted the style of Shah Nasir, his mentor, but soon surpassed him in popular esteem He came on the scene when the Moghal kings devoted greater attention and time to mushairas than to affairs of the state and employed leading poets for revising their own compositions They even bought up literary works of well known writers and passed them as their own Zauq too is believed to have been a victim of this practice Some of Bahadur Shah Zafar s best ghazals are said to have come from his pen

Zauq was an erudite scholar and exercised perfect command over the Urdu language His treatment of subjects such as religion and philosophy was as effective as that of love, a topic common to all poets How beautifully he expresses the uncertainty of life in the following verse

Laee hayat aae qaza le chali chale
Apni khushi na aae na apni khushi chale

(Destiny brought us into the world and death is taking us away We neither came nor are we going of our own free will)

Once writing to a friend about his own worries and difficulties Ghalib quoted the following couplet from one of Zauq's ghazals without mentioning the author s name

Ab to ghabara ke ye kehte hain ke mar jaenge
Mar ke bhi chain na paya to kidhar jaenge

(When overwhelmed by difficulties we say we shall seek out death But if death too does not bring us deliverance where shall then we go?)

Another of Ghalib s illustrious contemporaries was Momin Khan Momin (1800 1851) Being the son of a physician, Hakim Ghulam Nabi Khan, he began life writing prescriptions in his father s clinic Soon he turned his attention to

astrology and writing of Urdu poetry and achieved quick success in both Though the accuracy of his predictions won him many admirers it was his artistry with the Urdu language that brought him everlasting fame Imagine Ghalib offering to trade his whole collection of Urdu ghazals for the following verse of Momin

Tum mere paas hote ho goya
Jab koyee doosra nahin hota

The words of this couplet are so simple and yet so meaningful Translated it will read Whenever I am alone I feel *as if you* (the beloved) are with me that is you talk to me only when no other man is present Is it not quite natural for a man s thoughts to go to his beloved whenever he is alone?

Ghalib also liked the following famous couplet of the eighteenth century poet Mirza Rafi Sauda (1713 1780) and has mentioned it in his writings

Dikhla ye lejake tujhe misr ka bazar
Lekin koyee khowahan nahin wan jins i garan ka

(I would like to take you—the beloved—to a bazar in Egypt but there no one asks for costly goods)

A later day contemporary of Ghalib was Nawab Mirza Khan Dagh of Delhi (1831 1905) His father died when he was barely seven but got an easy entry into the court circles as a result of his widowed mother marrying the King s son, Mirza Fakhroo He also had the benefit of guidance from the Royal tutor Zauq

Dagh s pre eminent position in the domain of Urdu ghazal has been recognised by the literary critics of his time and also by those who followed him He preserved carefully the traditions of the old masters and did not allow the purity of the Urdu language to be affected by Western influences which had begun to make inroads into Indian culture long before h s time He lived and died an Oriental poet and there are not many among the Urdu litterateurs who

can match his devotion to this language He was at his best when handling a love theme Ghalib went into an ecstasy when he read Dagh s following verse

> *Rukh i roshan ke aage shama rakh kar wo ye kehte hain*
> *Udhar jata hai dekhen ya idhar parwana ata hai*

(The candle has been placed alongside the radiant face to find out to which of them goes the moth that is who shines more —the flame or the beloved s face ?)

There were a number of other poets both in Delhi and Lucknow who flourished during Ghalib s time and who have left their mark on Urdu literature Among them were Mirza Asghar Ali Naseem of Delhi Mir Majruh of Panipat, Imam Baksh Nasikh, Haidar Ali Atish and Daya Shankar Naseem (all of Lucknow) and the great elegy writers, Mir Babar Ali Anis and Mirza Salamat Ali Dabir (both of Lucknow) They have however all been eclipsed by Ghalib s phenomenal fame and his position in the heart of Urdu lovers Many more poets like Mohammed Iqbal and Jigar Moradabadi who were born after Ghalib held the stage mostly during their life time Their memory is slowly fading from the people s minds if it has not already done so But Ghalib s is a case altogether different He has found a berth among the ranks of immortals of the literary world like Kalidas Khayyam and Shakespeare

10

THE BIOGRAPHER

MIRZA GHALIB urdoubtedly suffered a great many disappoint ments in life as narrated in the previous chapters but in one respect he was absolutely fortunate In his disciple, Shams ul Ulama Maulana Altaf Husain Hali he found a biographer who by writing *Yadgar i Ghalib* (Memories of Ghalib) left to posterity a connected and by and large authoritative account of the life and activities of the greatest of Urdu poets But for Hali Ghalib s fame would have been only as much as, or a shade better than that of his contemporaries like Zauq Momin and Majruh who at that time were considered as skilful and subtle versifiers as the Mirza himself It will there fore be no exaggeration to say that next to his Urdu *Diwan* Ghalib owes the immortality of his name to his biographer

The reverse is perhaps equally true Had Hali not written *Yadgar i Ghalib* or had the subject of his memoir been a lesser luminary he would have passed into the vastnesses of time without much of a mention in the books of record At best he would have been remembered or read as one of the scores of prominent Urdu litterateures of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

Yadgar i Ghalib though not professing to be a critical analysis of Ghalib is as yet the best help (for Urdu readers)

to a study of the poet and his works It avoids the hyperbole of such writers as Dr Abdur Rahman Bijnawari who declared in his *Mahasin i Kalam i Ghalib* that, besides the sacred Vedas, India possesses but one inspired book which is *Diwan i Ghalib* ! Nor is Hali as severe in his judgment as Dr Syed Abdul Latif author of *Ghalib A Critical Appreciation of His Life and Urdu Poetry* who writes that "Ghalib was primarily a lyrical poet and should be judged as such and in no other capacity He cannot be numbered among the great ones of the earth to say nothing of the greatest ones Between these two extremes stands Hali who on account of his personal knowledge of Ghalib lends credence and colour to his narration He has quoted some of the finest verses in Ghalib s *Diwan* and written illuminating notes to explain their elegance or to bring out their significance Being his favourite pupil and enjoying close association with him, Hali got an oppor tunity of hearing some of the verses from Ghalib's own lips and discussing their meaning with him Quite a number of Ghalib s couplets are open to different interpretations Hali's explanations are generally accepted as authoritative They give us an indication of the development of the poet s mind Besides his reminiscences of the day to day life of his master make the readers feel as if they themselves were present when Ghalib said or did a particular thing It gives them a sense of personal participation in the thrilling events of that period and leaves them mentally satisfied This is perhaps an addi tional reason why Ghalib has drawn to himself more admirers than any other Urdu poet

By writing *Yadgar i Ghalib* Hali not only performed a duty which he owed to his master who was his ideal in litera- ture but also succeeded in removing the somewhat unfair impression which *Aab i Hayat* of Maulana Mohammed Husain Azad a leading Urdu critic and Hali s contemporary leaves on one s mind with regard to the merits of Ghalib s poetry Azad had the greatest regard and admiration for his own master Sheikh Mohammed Ibrahim Zauq who corrected the

King s compositions Ghalib and Zauq were the principal claimants to sovereignty over the realm of Urdu poetry during Bahadur Shah s time We need not, therefore, be surprised if Azad wanted to make out that on the whole Zauq was a greater poet than Ghalib It must however, be said to Azad s credit that he did not altogether shut his eyes to the eminence of Ghalib and has paid him rich tribute in *Aab i Hayat*, which is one of the most comprehensive histories of Urdu literature Hali however, refrains, quite wisely, from pitting the merits of one poet against those of another For the most part, he confines himself to explaining the difficult verses in Ghalib s *Diwan* and a narrative of his life which itself is as interesting as a work of fiction The book contains hundreds of anec dotes which not only tell us the kind of man that Ghalib was but also throw interesting light on the conditions obtaining in Delhi and other places in the turbulent days of the final phase of the tottering Moghal empire

Besides *Yadgar i Ghalib* Hali wrote the biographies of the great Persian poet, Sheikh Sa adi and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, a leading educationist and reformer of the nineteenth century As a matter of fact Hali was the first man who developed and perfected the art of biography writing in Urdu His place is quite high in the list of persons to whom modern Urdu owes a permanent debt of gratitude The late Sir Abdul Qadir who rose to be the Law Member to the Government of India before independence and who was a great patron of Urdu writers, says in his book *Famous Urdu Poets and Writers*, that Hali has left Urdu literature purer in thought and expre ssion than it was when he took upon himself the arduous task of reforming it In the line of literary criticism he is a writer of recognised merit whose writings have inspired and will continue to inspire many an aspirant to literary fame with lofty ideals

Even Dr Abdul Latif, who does not think very high of Ghalib s poetry has paid unstinted tribute to Hali in his book *The influence of English Literature on Urdu Literature*

He says "Hali is the leader and inspirer of the movement for a striking development in Urdu literature Another author, Professor Tahir Jamil in his book *Hali s Poetry A Study*, writes "Hali stands out pre eminent for his valu able services to Urdu poetry If the Syed (Sir Syed Ahmed Khan) succeeded in overcoming religious fanaticism Hali applied himself enthusiastically to purge Urdu poetry of exaggeration, artificiality and untruthfulness which were sucking the very life blood of literature

Sir Syed was the first to notice in Hali s style of writing a distinct departure from the old ghazal writers and a promise of remarkable achievements He suggested to him the idea of writing a poem on the fallen condition of Muslims Hali lost little time on acting in this suggestion He wrote a *Musaddas* (long poem with each stanza having six lines) and called it *Modd o Ja'r i Islam* (the Flow and Ebb of Islam) In this he adopted with telling effect the same line as was later taken by Sir Mohammed Iqbal recalling in vivid terms the glories of the early Arab polity and the brilliant con quests of the Sassanians in Asia Europe and Africa The aim was to rouse Indian Muslims from their intellectual stupor, social stagnation and economic decadence The poem changed the people's notion of Urdu poetry and made Hali the envy of his contemporaries Most of them tried their hand at poems in the *Musaddas* style but could reach no where near the standard set by Hali

After reading *Maddo Jazr i Islam* Sir Syed wrote to Hali ' From the moment I began to read the book I could not lay it aside until I had finished it and when I had finished it I felt sorry that it had come to an end The book is a model of elegance and eloquence Many of its stanzas cannot be read without the eyes getting wet with tears Any- thing that springs from the heart appeals to the heart It is true, as you have stated in your preface that I moved you to write this book and I regard this as a virtuous deed so that when I die and am questioned by God a

achievements in the world I shall point to this deed and say I have done nothing except being instrumental in Hali s writing of this book

Then followed from Hali s pen a number of poems in the same style and strain such as *Shikwa i Hind* (The Com plaint of India) and *Manajat i Bewa* (The Prayer of the Widow) He was the first Urdu poet to write a patriotic poem called *Hubb i Watan* (Love of Motherland) He was also the first to introduce political and economic themes in his verses and thus deal a formidable blow at the traditional style of Urdu poetry whose outstanding features until then had been artificiality, convention and unashamed hyperbole He tried to make simple facts attractive by the manner in which they were presented

Hali combines in himself the qualities of three of the top Urdu poets Ghalib Mir and Shefta This he acknow ledges in one of his couplets

Hali Sakhun men Shefta se mustfeed hun
Ghalib ka mautqad hun maqlad hun Mir ka

(In style and expression Hali has benefited from Shefta He has faith in Ghalib and is a follower of Mir)

Finding that his *Musaddas* while bringing a new awaken ing among Muslims, was also making them vain glorious and look too much to the past, Hali began writing poems that reminded them of their duty in the present to mankind in general and to Islam in particular and stressed on them the need to do something good and of abiding value Though most of his exhortations were addressed to his co religionists he was not altogether indifferent to the problems of Hindus His poems *Munajat i Bewa* and *Chup ki Dad* (In Praise of Silence) won him their admiration and gratitude No one could have served the cause of Indian womanhood better than done by Hali in these two poems

Hali also wrote a large number of *rubais* and short poems containing useful advice to the people especially

the youth His *rubais* were translated into English by an I C S official, Mr G E Ward, and were published in England Some of his other poems were translated into English by another western scholar Dr Spooner Among his wellknown poems in addition to those mentioned above, are *Barsat* (Rainy Season), *Ummed* (Hope) and *Rahm o Insaf* (Mercy and Justice)

Hali was equally proficient in the writing of prose Besides writing the three biographies mentioned above he translated into Urdu a book on geology which was published by the Punjab University Another of his prose works, *Majlis un Nisa* (Assembly of Women) remained for a long time a text book for girls schools in Punjab For writing it he was awarded a prize at a durbar held by Lord Northbrook Viceroy of India from 1872 to 1876 He also wrote a book, *Muqaddama Shero Shari*, in which he has analysed the different aspects and ideals of poetry as set forth in various literatures both of the East and West It shows tremendous research and hard work put in by the author to get the necessary information But the book that shows Hali at his best is *Yadgar i Ghalib* It is considered his magnum opus Of all his works, both in prose and verse it is liked and appreciated the most One may say without the least chance of ever being proved wrong that Hali will not be forgotten as long as Ghalib is remembered

Altaf Husain was born in 1837 He belonged to the famous family of Ansaris whose forbears had migrated to India from Herat in the time of Ghias ud Din Balban (over 750 years ago) and settled at Panipat in Punjab Hali had a disturbed childhood His mother became insane soon after his birth and the father died when he was only nine years old His brothers and sisters brought him up in a religious atmosphere and made him learn the Quran by heart He got a good grounding in Persian and Arabic from competent tutors without however getting the benefit of a regular schooling

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Balban had granted to Khwaja Malik Ali Hali's first ancestor in India a few fertile villages in the Panipat Pargana and appointed him as Qazi of the place Naturally Hali s brothers wanted him to follow the ancestral profession, that is become a Qazi in due time One of his teachers, Maulvi Ibrahim Husain Ansari was also a theologian But the boy was destined to become something greater than a mere village priest

Hali had not advanced very far in his studies and was barely seventeen when he was persuaded by his elders to get married This interrupted his studies for some time He was getting restless because he wanted to pursue a scholarly career Therefore one day he quietly slipped away from his house and went to Delhi where there was a galaxy of literary men in those days He wished to join the Old Delhi College but did not do so for fear of offending his people back home who would not tolerate any kind of Western education The Muslim theologians of those days held English schools in great contempt and called them *majhalas* (places where one remains ignorant) Thus de prived of English education, Hali devoted himself entirely to Oriental learning In 1856 he took a petty job in the *Collector s Office at Hissar but returned to Panipat after the* Mutiny broke out in the following year

During his stay in Delhi Hali became acquainted with Ghalib and paid him frequent visits to seek authoritative interpretation of his difficult verses, both Urdu and Persian Ghalib found that the young man had a poetic mind and a clear head He advised him to take to writing poetry, saying that he would be doing an injustice to his natural bent of mind if he did not do so Thus encouraged Hali started writing Urdu ghazals as was the vogue among Urdu and Persian poets

Attracted by the richness of his verses, Nawab Mustafa Khan of Jahangirabad invited Hali to live with him as a *musahib* (aide-de-camp) The Nawab himself was a well

known poet who wrote under the name of Hasrati in Persian and Shefta in Urdu Under his able guidance, Hali began to shine with lustre which increased as time passed The Nawab sent his own poems to Ghalib for correction Hali enclosed his compositions also for a final check up by Ghalib after they had been examined by Shefta

On the death of Shefta Hali got an appointment in the *Punjab Government Book Depot at Lahore* where his duties consisted of revising translations of English books into Urdu for the Education Department This work enabled him to get acquainted with English literature which widened his outlook He would occasionally get hold of students who knew English and would ask them to interpret English books to him The simplicity and directness characterising English writings impressed him a good deal and he began to have second thoughts about his praise and love of Persian books which he now found loaded with much dispensable wordage

Hali did not like Lahore and pined to return to Delhi From the literary point of view he considered Lahore to be a very poor substitute for Delhi Moreover as a new comer and stranger he had no friends in the Punjab capital During his stay in Lahore there was an outbreak of epidemics and he was taken ill He wrote

He who comes and lives in Lahore can realise that this is the world spoken of as the home of troubles There is so much of strangeness here that the nightingale does not know the rose

Later, Hali realised that he had been unfair in his criticism of this beautiful town He therefore added a footnote in his *Diwan* where these lines appear to the effect that they were written in a particular context His desire was at last fulfilled and he got a chance of returning to Delhi as a teacher in the Anglo Arabic School there As he grew old he became more and more philosophic in his writings and utterances In appreciation of his contribu

tion to the progress and enrichment of Urdu literature the Nizam of Hyderabad granted him a stipend of Rs 100 per month which he continued to receive till his death in 1914 He spent the last few years of his life in the native town of Panipat which he loved so well and which had been the home of his ancestors for several centuries



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